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FRANK READE'S WATER PLANE

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Frank Reade's Water Plane.

Stirring Adventures with the Young Inventor's Latest Wonder.

CHAPTER 1.

Barney and Pomp in a Ruction.—A Fugitive from Avengers.—The Story of the Mountain of Gold.

FRANK READE closed the roll-top desk in his library at Readestown, collected up the letters he had just written, and rang a bell for a servant.

Pomp, the genial negro who had accompanied the young inventor on so many of his perilous journeys in his wonderful machines, answered the summons.

"I want these letters posted at once," said Frank, handing the missives to the darkie. "And if anyone calls during the next hour or so you can tell them I am taking a walk and shall not be back for some little time."

"Yes, sah!" replied Pomp, and, stopping only to throw a cap on his head, the darkie started off for the post-office, whistling a merry tune as he hurried along.

He was passing a high fence when a shower of old cans, boots, and rubbish flew all over him. He uttered a wild shout of dismay, flung up his hands, and fell down.

The next moment a head popped up on the other side of the fence, and the broadly-grinning face of Frank Reade's Irish servant, Barney, appeared, looking down at him.

Barney had expected to see Pomp go rushing pell-mell down the road, frightened out of his wits. But when he observed, instead, the still, immovable figure of the old coon lying rigidly in the dust, he imagined at once that he had seriously injured him.

At a single bound he landed in the road, and bent over his old friend, gasping:

"I've kilt the naygur!"

This dismaying fear had hardly entered his mind when suddenly Pomp's fist shot upwards and struck him on the nose. A million constellations of bright stars seemed to flash up before Barney's eyes as he clapped his hand to his face and sprang up.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pomp, scrambling to his feet. "Yo' done t'ink yo' berry smart didn' yo', huh? Cotch dis niggah playin'

'possum dat time, yo' white trash! We'se quits now fo' shuah!"

Barney saw that he had been caught in his own trap, and he might have retaliated, but just then another matter occurred to attract the attention of both of them.

There sounded the roar of many angry voices around a bend in the road, sounding like the enraged cries of an excited rabble. Above the tumult rose a gruff and bluff voice, as if entreating for mercy and begging to be heard.

"What's that?" gasped Barney, in alarm.

"'Pears like's if dere was a fight," said Pomp.

Just then an old sailor rushed around the bend, hotly pursued by a gang of men, several of whom were armed.

"He's a murderer! Collar him!" shouted one of the men. "There's a hundred dollars reward offered! The detective said he wore a uniform!"

"I ain't a murderer!" shouted the old sailor, wildly, as he came to a pause in the road. "I'm Matt Middleton, an' I never done no feller critter no harm in this blessed world. Avast thar now, my hearties, an' bear down on the right craft, fer this old hulk ain't done no harm."

Just then a short, thin man, with a black moustache, appeared and dashed through the roaring crowd, which was rushing upon the old tar like a mountain avalanche. He glanced at the old mariner a moment.

"Stand back!" he cried to the crowd. "This isn't the man. Harry Howard, the fellow who shot Ralph Despard in a duel in New York, is a young man of twenty-two. He is in bicycling costume."

The crowd slunk back sullenly, and the old sailor grinned.

"The chap who shot the balloonist must be in some other part of the town," added the short, thin detective. "That he is here I am positive, for I tracked him myself. Now scatter—hurry!"

The detective and the gang of roughs whom he had bribed to aid him to run the fugitive down hurried away. The old sailor was left

standing in the middle of the road glancing ruefully after them.

"It's ther crazy ould sailor!" exclaimed Barney to Pomp. "Don't yez remimber ther loikes av him? Shure, an' he's ther wan who kem here yistherda', axin' fer Frank Reade, an' a-givin' us a cock-an'-bull story av a moighty mountain of goold that he says he wants ter foind somewheres in Australly."

"He am de same one. Done gone crazy, fo' shuah!" said Pomp, nodding his kinky head and grinning. "S'pose we'se gwine fo' ter le' dis chance pass by, Barney—eh, chile?"

He tapped his forehead and winked so knowingly that Barney could not fail to understand that he wanted to put up a job of some kind on the old sailor, and they began to whisper.

Just then the bushes parted beside the road a short distance further on, and Frank Reade and a young man in bicycle costume stepped out from amid the shrubbery. They came to a sudden pause upon seeing Barney, Pomp, and Matt Middleton standing in the road.

"Oh," said Frank, reassuringly, "you need not be alarmed, Mr. Howard, for that negro and Irishman are my friends, and the crowd is gone. Now tell me what was the matter. You are not a bad fellow, if I am a judge of human nature."

"I fell in love with May Bertram, a beautiful orphan girl who lived in New York, and Ralph Despard, a balloonist, also became very much enamoured of her. She gave me her preference. Despard challenged me to fight a duel. We met in a barn, for he insulted me. I shot him. Whether I killed him or not I do not know, but I fled. A detective pursued me to this town all the way from New York. If you had not come to my aid just now he would have captured me."

"So that is the way the case stands, eh?" said Frank.

"That and nothing more. Will you cast me off now?"

"No. You said Despard was a villain and tried to assassinate you; so you did right to fight him. I will assist you all I can."

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Reade!" said Harry Howard, pressing the young inventor's hand. "I hope to repay you some day."

"Bosh! Ah! look! see that Irishman and negro; they are regular imps of mischief! Evidently they mean to play some practical joke on that old sailor whom your enemies just mistook for you. Just keep quiet, and we'll see what they are going to do."

Harry Howard nodded and crouched back in the shrubbery with Frank, where they could see and hear all without being discovered.

Barney and Pomp had evidently come to a conclusion of their plan, for they walked over to Matt Middleton, and Barney tapped him on the arm,

"Arrah, sor!" said the Irishman, with a grin, "an' isn't it Misther Reade, yer afther wantin' may I be so bowled as to inquoire?"

"Oh!" said the sailor, making a sudden clutch at the bosom of his shirt with a frightened air; then, turning and seeing who it was that alarmed him, his fear left him, and he smiled and said:

"Jingo! you scared me then. Yes—yes. I do want to run afoul o' Mr. Reade, my hearty. An' can I see him?"

"Faix, an' yer a-luckin' at him now," said Barney, hardly able to conceal his mirth as the old man fastened his glance on Pomp.

"What! Blow me, but there mus' be some mistake, my lad. This 'ere coloured man can't be him. Dash it, I thought——"

"Worra, an' is it Mr. Reade's histry yer not afther knowin'?" interrupted Barney.

"Waal, I've hearn tell a mighty good sight about him."

"Yer knows as he's thravelled in many furrin parts."

"So I have heard."

"Thin don't be afther mistakin' him for ther loikes av a naygur. Shure, an' he's only sunburn'd. D'yer want to insult him, sor, be a-sayin he's only a common, ordinary, naygur?"

Pomp began to get cross at this, and covertly shook his fist at Barney behind the sailor's back, whereat Barney only grinned broader. Matt Middleton hastily began to make amends for an error he imagined he had made by bowing profoundly to Pomp.

"I ax parding, Mr. Reade," he said. "Folks will make mistakes, jedgin' by appearances, you know. I've travelled a sight myself, havin' been in nigh every part on this blessed globe in my day; but durn me if ever I got sich a tannin' as you have. I s'pose it's accordin' ter ther elerwated latitudo in which you travels?"

"S'pecs it am, honey," said Pomp, who was secretly tickled to be mistaken for the wonderful young inventor. "But wha' yo' want?"

"I calkerlate I kin 'splain matters in mighty few words, cappen," earnestly said the gulled old sailor. "Everyone thinks as Matt Middleton is a madman, but he ain't. Wot he has got is dead certain proof o' wot he ses, an' he's willin' ter put ther biggest fortune ther world ever seen inter ther hands o' Frank Reade, if so be Frank Reade 'll help ter git it."

"Dis yar pug-nosed, freckle-faced Irish baboon done tole me yo' been ter see me 'bout dat mattah befoah," said Pomp, pointing at Barney with his thumb, "an' I done tole yo'. chile, I'se a-gwine fo' ter kick dat red-headed galoot ob a sarbant out ob my employ ef he doan' he moah 'tentive to my business affairs."

Barney winced and almost kicked himself at this dig, but he was powerless just then to refute the grinning Pomp's calumnies. The

old sailor looked a little surprised at Pomp's talk, for he felt sure he was addressing a negro, yet so important was his business with Frank Reade that he did not want to risk any chances of success by arguing the matter.

"If so be as you'll sit down by ther road-side here wi' me," he said, "I'll tell yer jist what it was as brung me all the way from New York ter see yer, Mr. Reade, an' I calkerlate as you'll be a werry s'prised man when I tells yer all's I've got ter say."

Pomp winked at Barney, and together they sat down on each side of Middleton. Even the hidden Frank and Harry Howard were wrought up to a pitch of inquisitiveness and remained perfectly quiet, listening to what was transpiring.

"Waal," said the sailor, as he drew a piece of old oil-silk from his pocket. "I'll be as brief as I kin, tellin' yer how I came by this 'ere secret, an' when I'm done yer kin jedge ther hull matter fer yerself."

"It was some twenty-five years ago I was shipwrecked on ther north-eastern seaboard of Australia, an' was captured by ther natives. They brung me inter ther interior, an' while there I saved the life o' one o' ther ole men o' a neighbouring tribe, who was captured along o' me. We escaped together, but on our journey to ther sea-coast he was took with a fever which I seen would kill him. Afore he died he told me that there was a golden city hidden in a mountain, plum in ther middle of Australia, which I knowed mus' be Central Mount Stuart. He had l'arned ther secret from his father, an' gave me directions how ter git thar."

"Handin' me this werry roll of oil-silk he told me o' many dangers I'd hev ter go through ter reach ther buried city, an' then he died. I journeyed ter ther mountain," continued the old sailor, in earnest tones, "an' arter many trials, troubles, an' much labour, I penetrated that 'ere golden city. It was wonderful. Gold, gold, gold everywhere, an' it was an enormous treasure. But I could only carry a little away, and that I had ter sell ter git back home aga'n. It was jist as hard ter git away from thar, over a fiery chasm, through a den o' wild beasts, an' two bands o' giants an' dwarfs, as it was ter git thar, but I done it."

"When I got back ter this ere country I tried ter interest different rich people ter help me ter get that wonderful treasure, but all laughed at me an' everybody said I was crazy. Yet here's ther old manuscripts that old bushman gave me rolled in this oil-silk. A perfesser translated it fer me. It's writ in a foreign language. Look at it an' jedge fer yerself. I knowed you had flyin' machines an' sich-like, which'd be handy ter git it, an' I thought as I'd come ter yer an' tell yer all about it. If yer failed ter believe old Matt Middleton, then he wasn't a-goin' ter do no

more but prepare his old hulk fer Davy Jones's Locker."

He handed a scroll of parchment to Pomp, which he unrolled from the old silk, and the negro beheld several lines of writing in a strange language, and underneath it the English translation which read:

"I, the king, with twenty men and our wives, walked westward, two moons, to one high mountain, in the heart of the land. We found temples and golden treasure there, and the tomb of the first kings. There we have lived many years in the great mountain, willingly. My beloved brothers, who went to the south and north, have peopled the rivers. At the blood-red rock we climbed above three days, and at the Man's Head Rock afterwards we entered the gate to the houses below the mountain. The world's treasures filled the places—gold—and the skeletons of men * * *

"BUDDAI."

It was a singular manuscript, and, coupled with Matt Middleton's story, it savoured of such probability that Frank Reade was struck, for he could read the words on the parchment from where he stood.

Indeed, so impressed was he that he emerged from the midst of the trees, followed by Harry Howard, and, approaching the trio, he said:

"Look here, boys, this joke has gone far enough."

The three were startled, and simultaneously sprang to their feet.

"I have heard the story and read this paper," continued Frank, "and I am inclined to give credence to the matter. You look a little surprised Matt Middleton. But I will undeceive you. I am Frank Reade—the one whom you are seeking. These two men are my friends, and they have been fooling you. But come up to my house, and I will have a long talk with you. If there is any truth in your story I not only will aid you to find this mountain of gold, but will put at your disposal my latest invention, by the aid of which we can easily reach it. Pomp, go on to the post-office."

The crestfallen darkie moved away with the letters, and the astonished Matt Middleton, Barney, and Harry Howard followed the young inventor back to his house.

They had hardly entered, however, when a man with a black beard and piercing black eyes came from behind a rock near where they had been standing.

"So this is where Howard has found shelter?" he said, half-aloud. "Confound him! I've found him out, and he shall never leave here alive! And it will be strange if I do not have my share of that mountain treasure. Ralph Despard, you are in luck, and no mistake!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Plans Stolen.—A Struggle for Life in Mid-air.—In the Grip of a Dust Storm.

WHEN Frank and the three others entered the house a guest was found there who had called to see the young inventor.

He was none other than Frank's old friend—Dr. Vaneyke, the scientist and explorer—and after the first greetings were over Matt Middleton was asked to repeat his story more in detail, while the professor examined the ancient manuscripts. At the end of the narrative the scientist announced it as his firm conviction that there was truth in Middleton's yarn. Dr. Vaneyke was well acquainted with the history of the early tribes of Australia, and he was convinced that the story of the mountain of gold agreed with certain wanderings of some of the tribes.

"For my part," added the professor, "were this old man to start an expedition tomorrow, I should be one of the first to join him, if I were invited to do so."

"Then, by jingo!" said Frank, jumping up, "you shall have a chance, professor, for I am going in search of the mountain of gold with him, and shall start within a week in my new invention—a water plane. I have it completed, as you know, and was only awaiting an opportunity like this to make use of it. Now, who will go?"

There was not a dissenting voice, for even Harry Howard, pursued as he was like a wild beast for a murder he had never committed, was anxious to escape from the country.

The old sailor was delighted beyond measure, and at the professor's suggestion he drew a crude map of the mountain with explanatory notes of how to reach the golden city. Frank took this map and the old manuscript in his own hands and tied them together with a string, remarking, jubilantly:

"Land, ocean, mountains, valleys, rivers, and plains will be as nothing to us now. I have got a vessel that far surpasses anything I have ever yet turned out. Most of you have seen it in its first stage, but if you will follow me I will show you the details now. Then, Matt Middleton, if you are afraid of an aerial voyage in it you can remain behind."

A strange sight met the view of the spectators in the yard of Frank's workshop. It was the water plane, and, as Frank had said, it far surpassed anything he had before invented.

In shape and make it was partly aeroplane and partly water plane, but so constructed that it could rise into the air from either land or water, and could sail over both.

In the middle of the hull or central deck was a large cabin-like construction capable of holding half a dozen or more persons. Powerful searchlights were to be seen on either side of the forward propeller.

Frank explained the workings of the engines and planes of the enormous invention, and when their curiosity was satiated they returned to the house, where the professor left them, and Barney and Pomp busied themselves in making ready for instant departure.

By the following night everything was in readiness, and Frank and Middleton sat in the parlour at a table near the window, beside which was the the only gas fixture that lighted the room. They were talking over their plans and alternately glancing out in the dark yard beyond at the great water plane, in which the doctor, Barney, Pomp, and Harry Howard were housed.

Frank had the valuable papers on the table before him, having just read them through, when two hands darted in through the open window. One turned out the light and the other snatched away the papers. Quick as thought Frank sprang through the window, but the thief was gone.

Luckily for Frank, his wonderful memory retained every word of the translation of the parchment letter, as he had just read it, and he immediately returned to the house and wrote a facsimile of it, and secured a new drawing of the old sailor's plan from Middleton.

On the following night Frank and Harry Howard left the house to sleep on board the water plane with the others, when the young inventor caught sight of a man hiding behind a shed.

The two crept forward quietly, thinking he was the manuscript thief, when they saw that he was the detective who had been pursuing Howard. He was accompanied by the same gang of ruffians who attacked the old sailor.

"There's no use fooling, boys," the detective was saying, so that they could overhear him. "I'll own up. Ralph Despard is alive. He was only wounded. He wants revenge upon Harry Howard now. He was here last night, and stole a valuable paper from Reade. He wants this trip stopped, and has paid handsomely for it, so we must smash this contrivance—whatever it is—or retard them somehow to give Despard the start.

"Treachery!" gasped Frank, in startled amazement.

"My rival is the thief who robbed you!" groaned Howard.

He spoke unguardedly, and the detective and his gang heard him. With a rush they started out from behind the shed after the two young men. Both ran for the water plane, some distance away, while the detective shouted:

"Stand, or we'll shoot at you!"

They paid no heed to this threat, but continued on, and a volley was discharged at their dim, fleeing forms, but the pursuers missed their mark.

In a moment they were upon the deck of the water plane. Frank dashed into the

wheel-house, pulled a lever, there came a loud buzz, and, just as the ruffians drew near, the water plane glided forward in a steady ascent.

It was a much quicker start than he intended to make, but the harmless hail of bullets that rattled against the bottom of the hull told Frank that he had gone none too soon.

There were servants in the house who would attend to everything, and when the professor suggested that they start off on their journey at once Frank was nothing loth, and the water plan was turned westward.

The "Greyhound" worked like magic, passing upward through a mass of clouds.

Barney had gone to the machine-room as first engineer, Pomp as usual was assigned to the governorship of the culinary department, and, while Dr. Vaneyke was to act as assistant steersman, Harry Howard was posted to assist Barney, with Matt Middleton acting as a general assistant to all hands. Another man was sadly needed, though, to take turns with the old sailor as lookout, and to attend to other matters. In view of this fact, Frank resolved to make one stop ere reaching the Pacific Coast and secure another individual.

There was a trellis-work bulwark around the deck, and when the water plane was well under way all but Frank went out of the wheel-house and enjoyed the sensation of sailing through space.

Presently a crashing sound below apprised the doctor that the ship was passing over a thunder-cloud, and an instant later the electricity attracting the steel of the vessel suddenly gave it a wrench that knocked all hands over, and the water plane dived down.

Frank promptly grasped a lever and pulled it out, when with a whir the machine regained its balance and shot ahead again.

Through the electrified cloud-banks went the water plane, and in less than a minute she was below the storm in the falling rain.

Frank breathed a sigh of relief, but suddenly he was startled by hearing a fearful shriek directly beneath the water plane.

Just then Barney rushed up to the search-lights in the bow, and, touching an electric press-button, sent the strong rays flashing out ahead.

All around flashed the light as the rest rushed up to him. Shriek upon shriek in that same thrilling, feminine tone reached their ears, appealing for mercy. Then an immense balloon floated within the rays, and in the basket beneath a man and woman were plainly revealed. The man had the woman clutched by the throat with one hand, while with the other he brandished a dagger. A hoarse cry of horror pealed from Harry Howard's pallid lips.

"Great Heaven!" he groaned, his form quivering as he pointed a trembling finger

at those in the balloon. "There is May Bertram, my affianced wife, in that basket with Ralph Despard, my rival, and the monster is endeavouring to murder her!"

"But I'll stop him!" cried Frank, and in a twinkling he had a revolver pointed at the man who had caused Harry all his trouble and who had stolen Matt Middleton's valuable documents.

Bang! went the weapon an instant later, and with a cry of pain Despard relaxed his hold upon his victim and reeled back.

But he quickly recovered himself, and, seizing a parachute which lay folded in the car, he sprang from the basket and disappeared towards the ground. It was the work of a madman, it seemed, but Despard acted just as his frightened wits prompted him.

Seeing the water plane so near he had immediately jumped to the conclusion that Frank's next shot would end his life, and, coward as he was, abandoned the girl and took what he considered was the one course whereby he might keep a whole skin.

But the men of the "Greyhound," as Frank had named the water plane, were made of sterner stuff, and determined to rescue the lone girl, who still clung to the side of the basket of the balloon.

"There is one chance!" cried Frank. "We must throw a rope to the balloon and the girl must make it fast to the basket. Then we can haul the balloon close enough to get her aboard."

Howard grasped a coil of rope and sprang to the rail of the water plane.

"Get ready, May!" he cried to his sweetheart. "Catch this rope if you can and make it fast. It is your only chance!"

He threw the rope with splendid precision, and the plucky girl caught it, gave it several turns round one of the stay-ropes, and tied it as tightly as her frail hands would allow.

Barney and Pomp threw their weight on the rope then and pulled for all they were worth, and a few minutes later the balloon had been dragged to the hull of the water plane and May Bertram had been hauled aboard.

Then the balloon was cut adrift before it could damage the planes, and Frank Reade's invention whirled onwards at renewed speed.

For a time the girl was too hysterical to account for her strange predicament, but she soon recovered her composure and told her story.

"Ralph Despard was not killed in the duel, but he pretended to be, in order to save his cowardly life," she said. "When you fled, Harry, he sent a private detective to hunt you out of New York so that he could press his attentions upon me. Left an orphan, I had a sore trial resisting his detested advances. Two nights ago he called at my lodgings, and, adroitly drugging me, I was abducted by him. For two days he kept me under the influence

of his subtle drugs, meantime, as I learned on his return, he having gone to a place called Readestown, where he stole some valuable papers, by means of which he hoped to enrich himself by finding a mythical mountain of gold."

"Yes, we know all about that matter, and it is true, too, May," said Howard.

"Indeed? Well, stupefied again with drugs, I was taken to some Western town, to where he had sent his balloon to give a public ascent. I was put in the car, he pocketed the proceeds of a sale of tickets, and, disappointing the audience which was to appear next day, he had the balloon inflated during the night and rose skyward with me."

"To take you on his journey to Australia in the balloon?"

"I presume so. In the air I regained my senses, and he told me of my situation. We fought. He saw the water plane, and the sight maddened him. Seeing that his plans failed, and that his life was in danger if he encountered you, he resolved to spring out and run chances of reaching the earth with a parachute. You know the rest."

The girl was too weak to continue the conversation, so a cabin was prepared for her, and she retired.

The next day found the "Greyhound" still speeding at an altitude of about 5,000 feet above the land, with the Rocky Mountains in view far ahead.

Below them they could see the sinuous path of a railway winding through forests, over plains, through villages, and over silvery, serpentine rivers.

Frank designed that their course should take them south from there through Nevada, down into California, whence their great trip across the Pacific Ocean would commence. But their fate was to be decided in a far different manner. The young inventor was standing on deck talking to Dr. Vaneyke, describing in detail the mechanism of his wonderful water plane, and Frank had hardly finished his explanation when suddenly there came a cry from Pomp, who had been standing forward looking up at the distant mountains, and they all glanced ahead.

"A cyclone!" exclaimed Frank, eyeing the sky ahead.

"No," said the professor. "It is simply a wind-storm coming over the mountains; but it is a mighty dangerous customer. That fine dust has been lifted from some Pacific island or blown from the crater of a volcano in a state of eruption. If we plunge through it the bearings of the water plane's machinery may become so clogged that it won't work, and we may go crashing earthward faster than we came up."

Without uttering a single word Frank hurried into the pilot-house. Grasping the levers he stopped the advance of the water plane, which began to descend.

The erratic movements of the queer dust-cloud forestalled him, though, for, ere they were a thousand feet nearer the earth, they became enveloped in it. In an instant the machine was enshrouded, and the dust covered it all over, changing the appearance of everything.

A few moments later there sounded a strange grating noise in the engine. Then the wheels began to stick, slip, stick, and stop. The dust was getting in the bearings, and although the pressure kept the wheels spinning it was obvious that it must soon choke them so that they would be unable to perform their functions.

Down sank the water plane faster and faster. Frank glanced significantly at the doctor, and Vaneyke understood him.

Just then there came a fearful shock, and, glancing out of the window, the youth saw that the "Greyhound" had struck against something looming up beneath its hull.

CHAPTER 3.

The Gamblers of Glory Gulch.—An Enemy Joins the Water Plane's Crew.

FRANK grasped a lever and pulled it well over, and the vessel, settling slowly down, finally struck the earth. Then they saw that it was the ledge of a rocky acclivity which they first touched. But they made a safe landing, and presently the semi-gloom faded away and the sunlight began to gleam through the reddish mist.

Objects afterwards became plain to them, and gradually they began to discern a number of small wooden houses scattered here and there, while close beside them was a railway line.

Frank went out on deck, and saw that the "Greyhound" was coated with dust particles, while a number of the natives of the settlement, all looking like miners, came hurrying towards them.

"Mining settlement?" asked Frank of the foremost.

"I reckon."

"What district is this?"

"Idaho, an' I'm Big Jim wot rules ther roost in Sandy Ellis's shebang yander. I dunno whether yer knows wot greased lightnin' is in your diggings, but if you'll drap inter Sandy's slush-bucket wi' me I'll treat ther hull crowd o' yer."

He pointed at the rest, who had come out on deck just then, and leered at May Bertram; but Frank had learned all he wanted to know as he replied, carelessly:

"Much obliged, but I've got to get this machine to rights so I can go sky-scraping again. Good-day, my friend."

The roost ruler looked amazed, and then recovering he cried:

"Hull on thar, pard! Kain't I cum up thar on thet thing?"

"No admittance except on business," replied Frank.

"Now, look hyer, I don't never take 'No' fer an answer, d'yer see? An' I'm drefful cur'us ter see jist wot thet consarn is made of."

As Big Jim said this he tapped his dirty belt, in which was thrust a brace of huge pistols, as if to signify that a refusal would lead him to use them. Then he approached the water plane, and, jumping up, he caught hold of the bulwark to hoist himself on board.

"Barney," shouted Frank to the Irishman, who was in the pilot-house, "pull lever No. 5!"

Big Jim received an electric shock that nearly paralysed him, and, suddenly letting go, he fell to the ground, while the other miners fairly howled with laughter. He did not say a word after he got upon his feet, but, bending a look of amazement first at his hands and then at the water plane, he suddenly took to his heels and ran away.

That frightened the others away, and when they were gone all hands turned to work vigorously to clean the machinery. But the dust had created so much damage that several days slipped by before their labour was at an end. In the meantime, everyone in the town had come and inspected the queer craft.

At the end of the third day Frank left the "Greyhound" for the purpose of making an examination of the town, as they were to depart that night as soon as he returned.

It was not a very large settlement, its chief industry being silver mining in the hill whereon the water plane first struck, and it consisted of a railway-station, a grocery store, a score of houses, and several drinking-saloons, besides the mining property.

It was a cool, clear night, and as Frank walked through the main street he came to a vile-looking resort bearing the name of Sandy Ellis, wherein was congregated a crowd of noisy miners.

Out of mere curiosity Frank went into the saloon, and saw that the noisy demonstration was made over the card-tables, at which a number of miners sat gambling. They glanced at him curiously as they recognised him as one of the men from the water plane; but he paid no attention to them, and, joining a group clustered round one of the tables, he peered over at the players.

They were two in number, one being Big Jim, and the other a smooth-faced man with a long nose and black hair.

The two were playing draw poker, and as Frank joined the group he saw that the be-whiskered miner was losing heavily.

The smooth-faced man coolly and quietly pocketed his winnings and announced that he would play one more deal.

"It is only to give you a chance to get even," said he, quietly.

"An', sufferin' snakes," said Big Jim,

swearing roundly at his ill fortune, "it's nigh time, too, fer here's ther last ounce o' silver I've got!"

He paid it up, and the stranger—for such he was in the town—shuffled and dealt the cards. He then paid up, and the miner drew two cards while he drew one.

Big Jim called him at once and laid a hand on the stakes.

"Hold on, there, that's mine!" said the stranger. "Look here!"

"How's this, though, eh?" demanded Jim, with an evil leer.

They both flung down their hands, when, to everybody's surprise, each was seen to hold four aces. That one or the other had cheated was manifest at once, and they accused each other of foul play, while a wild howl went up from the crowd, who looked unfavourably at the stranger.

He was a determined fellow, though, for he jerked a revolver from his hip-pocket, covered the miner, and seized the pot.

"Turn over your cards until I see the backs!" he exclaimed.

"Naw, I won't!" growled Jim.

"Then I will do it for you!" interposed Frank.

And, reaching out, he did as he threatened in a twinkling. Everybody saw that Big Jim's four aces were printed on cards with backs of a different pattern from those of the pack they had been using.

He drew his own weapon, and was about to fire at the stranger, when Frank gave him a push and sent him reeling.

"Stranger," said the young inventor to the smooth-faced man, "I have seen how he cheated you, and I'll back you up. You don't belong to this town, do you?"

"No; just arrived to-day."

"I thought so. Then come with me."

The rest of the gang looked ugly, so the stranger willingly accepted Frank's invitation, and they ran out of the saloon together. But the miners had no inclination to allow them to get away so easily, and, with Big Jim at their head, the whole gang came on in pursuit, firing as they ran.

Luckily, however, their shots went wide, and, stopping only once to return the fire and thus give a check to their pursuers, Frank and the stranger soon came in sight of the water plane.

Hearing the commotion, Barney had turned on the searchlights, and as soon as the glare fell on the pursuing miners, Pomp and Matt Middleton opened fire on them so effectually that the whole gang came to a stop, paralysed by the blinding light as much as the rain of bullets which fell upon them.

And ere they could recover from the check thus given to them, Frank and his companions had reached the water plane, and the young inventor was manipulating the levers which were to send the machine aloft.

Up and up they went, leaving the disappointed miners raving like a lot of lunatics.

"They look as if they might be surprised," said the young inventor to the stranger, who stood in the pilot-house beside him.

"Scarcely more so than I am," replied the man. "Is this plane quite safe, sir? I confess that I feel rather shaky."

"As safe as if you were on the land. But I say, how came you to be in Glory Gulch, gambling with Big Jim?"

"I arrived there by train, to-day, quite accidentally. The fact is I was on my way to California to prospect."

Frank glanced at him intently for a moment.

"It seems to me," said he, presently, "that I have met you before."

"Hardly possible, sir. I'm a New Yorker, name of Jack Flush," said the other, shrugging his shoulders.

A little later Frank left the steering apparatus in Barney's care and went out with the man and introduced him to the others.

Harry Howard was as much struck with Jack Flush as Frank had been, for as soon as the stranger spoke the young man started, bent a piercing glance upon the other, and with a curious look upon his face he asked:

"Haven't I met you before somewhere, Mr. Flush?"

"Mr. Reade asked me the same question. How odd! It must be a fancied resemblance, however."

Harry shook his head with a puzzled look.

"Perhaps," he hesitatingly replied. "Yet, you so strongly remind me of—of—of—— Let me see. Who can it be?"

He pondered a moment, meantime keeping a sharp scrutiny fastened upon the stranger, who smilingly returned his glance; but the effort failed—he could not remember.

May Bertram touched Harry upon the arm.

"I recollect," said she, quietly. "He looks like Ralph Despard."

"Yes, by Jove! so he does!" exclaimed Harry, vehemently.

"Ah! I recall to mind," said Frank. "It was a photograph of your enemy which you showed me, Howard, that made me think I had seen Mr. Flush somewhere before. But then Mr. Despard wore a thick black beard and rather long hair, if the fleeting glimpse I caught of him falling from the balloon, clinging to the parachute, was correct."

"Who is the gentleman you refer to that I resemble?" blandly asked Jack Flush, with a curious expression.

"Oh, he is an enemy of mine," said Harry. "But he must either be dead, or at all events, he is certainly many hundred miles from here. I must be mistaken, as you say, and trust that you will pardon the error."

Jack Flush bowed stiffly, a strangely sarcastic expression upon his face; and he replied, in careless tones:

"Such mistakes are not at all rare. And

now, Mr. Reade, as I am to become one of your crew, if you will kindly assign me to my quarters, and explain my duties, I will endeavour to do my work to your entire satisfaction."

"You will occupy room No. 9," said Frank, "and can assist Matt Middleton in the general work such as he will explain to you."

The stranger bowed again, and, averting his dark face to conceal a sinister smile, he walked aft with the old sailor, muttering beneath his breath:

"Safe! I feared exposure. But Ralph Despard's smooth face has saved him. They don't know me. By heavens, this chance luck is wonderful! Landed safe with my parachute, and resolved to seek my fortune in California, I set out, giving up all hopes of ever seeing the water plane or its passengers again. Stranded for want of funds to proceed further than Glory Gulch, I had to alight from the train to try my luck with the cards. Ah, Ralph Despard, there is a wonderful destiny before you. Chance has thrown the means in your way to gain a wife and a huge fortune, and at the same time to avenge yourself."

And Ralph Despard went down into the machine-room with the bluff old sailor, to oil the machinery.

CHAPTER 4.

Nearly Wrecked by a Water Spout.—Jack Flush Tries his Hand at Murder.—Frank Reade in Dire Peril.

DESPITE the presence of the rogue Despard on board the water plane, several days passed without untoward incident, and at last the wonderful invention sailed over San Francisco and commenced its journey over the mighty Pacific.

Although there was something about Despard, or Jack Flush, as he called himself, which excited the suspicion of his companions, they could find nothing definite to go on. Once, indeed, after a slight breakdown in the machinery, Frank felt inclined to land the fellow and let him go his own way; but Flush gave such a clever reason for his share of the trouble that the young inventor, knowing that he would have to delay to engage another hand if he got rid of Flush, put the matter from his mind and allowed the man to stay with them.

And now they were soaring above the heaving waters of the Pacific, sailing direct for the Australian continent.

On the third night from land they had covered a distance of two thousand miles, passing over the Sandwich Islands in the tropic of Cancer, and kept on for the Maldives, where the "Greyhound" was to turn south for the Friendlies, and thence pass on between the New Hebrides and New Caledonia Islands.

It was early in the evening, and the water plane was speeding towards an enormous mass of clouds, with Barney at the wheel and the others lounging about the deck, amusing themselves in various ways.

The Irishman had his glance fixed searchingly upon the cloud banks ahead, when he suddenly felt a peculiar downward motion of the vessel.

Then he found that the water plane began to strain, as if trying to tear itself up from the clutches of some mighty giant.

Frank came rushing into the pilot-house, and the others ran to the bulwarks and peered down at the darkening sea. The column of cloud approached nearer and nearer the water, hanging down from the rest in a black, threatening mass, when the waves beneath it became turbulent and frothy.

Then, in spite of the earth's gravitation, the waves formed in an immense billow, the excrescence rising and rising to meet the down-hanging column of vapoury cloud, the magnetic force of which was pulling the water plane and the fast-growing wave along with it.

The cylindrical cloud was half a mile in length, the sea wave boiling furiously beneath it, yet all nature around it was serene. Suddenly the column of cloud met the sea wave and darted upward with it, gyrating furiously, and causing the airship, which was drawn within a short distance of it, to begin to whirl.

"It is a waterspout!" shouted Frank, as he dashed into the pilot-house and the others sought shelter under cover. "A waterspout, Barney, and it is dragging us within its coils, and may tear the water plane to pieces before we can save ourselves."

The young inventor drew the propeller lever out to its fullest extent and the water plane dragged itself ahead, the screws beating so furiously as to jar the ship from stem to stern. But the force of suction was not to be so easily overcome, for although she kept at a greater distance from the waterspout, she still described great circles around it in a threatening manner.

Frank sent the water plane to a higher altitude. Up and up she went, revolving all the time around the great rushing mass of water.

"We must be prepared for a desperate chance now," said the youth. "Call down the tube to the others to remain inside. I am going out on deck to break that spout, Barney. Be careful now."

He took a dynamite cartridge, and, leaving the pilot-house, he reached a small brass gun near the searchlight, opened the breach, and loaded the piece. The "Greyhound" was making shorter revolutions at the apex of the waterspout, and acted in a very eccentric manner.

Awaiting his chance he discharged the

gun at the column; a dull reverberation followed, and then there sounded a terrifying roar—a hissing like steam pouring from the valve of a monster engine—and he felt something strike him a violent blow. Instinctively he flung out his hands and grasped the railings, his senses never deserting him for a moment.

The water plane gave a violent lurch, and he felt that he was suddenly enveloped in a mighty mass of water. The next instant the water plane capsized. For a brief space Frank was hanging by the rail, feet downward in space, the great machine over his head.

The water plane fell like a thunderbolt for an instant, and then came to a violent pause. She had suddenly spun round in the dense mist, regaining her equilibrium as by a miracle. The machinery began to pound, and she righted herself and floated again in a zigzag fashion upward and onward. Frank again found himself lying on the deck, breathless, it is true, but unhurt by the terrible experiences.

He bounded to his feet and glanced around. He saw that the waterspout was broken and gone.

In the forward window of the pilot-house the scared face of Barney suddenly appeared, with his cap jammed down over his ears, much as if he had struck the floor on his head, and he peered hard at the inventor.

The water plane was going at a fearful rate, and the wind was shrieking past Frank like an avalanche. He staggered across the deck and crept into the pilot-house.

"Barney, my boy, we are all right now!" he gasped, as he reduced the rate of speed at which they were travelling and began to sink the machine from the enormous height to which she had mounted.

"Begob, she's an acrobat—turnin' sich somersaults in the air, sor!" said Barney.

"But an unerring one. Luckily, she has a ballasted keel, otherwise we might have hurtled down into the sea upon our heads."

"An' there's ther dicking ov a schquawkin' down in ther cabin—listen!"

"It is May Bertram's voice. Doubtless they are all terrified."

"Be aisy! It's arl roight now!" yelled Barney through the speaking-tube. "Faith, we're floatin' along wid the wind, so we are, an' it's b'atin' it ter Austrailay we are, too!"

An anxious answer came back, and, hearing that all were safe, they were told they could come out if they liked, whereupon all hands complied, and the matter was talked over all the night long by the aerial voyagers.

The water plane had not suffered any damage, and Frank was heroised for his skill until it made him weary.

"Verily," was the sneering thought of Jack Flush, as he walked out on deck, "he

is a noble hero! But his reign of triumph will be very short-lived if my plans prove successful."

There was a dark, evil look upon his face, and, thinking that he was unobserved, he shook his clenched fist in the direction of the pilot-house.

"Golly, Massa Flush! Who you'se a-goin' ter hit, sah?"

It was Pomp who spoke, and the guilty man started. He glanced around hastily and saw the old darkie emerge from the store-room close behind him.

"Oh, Pomp! it's you, is it? Ha, ha, ha! You startled me. I was just shaking my fist at that deceptive sky. You can't trust it. Recollect its recent splurge? Beautiful to look upon, behind its smiling exterior there lurks a devil and a million imps which momentarily threaten our lives."

He walked aft then, and Pomp stood gazing after him in silence. Then he softly muttered:

"You'se mighty like dat sky yo' speak ob, sah! Might pay dis chile fo' to watch yo', Massa Flush."

On the following day the water plane passed over the Malgraves and had two-thirds of her ocean voyage completed.

It was a clear day, and, the water being fairly calm, Frank brought the machine down to the surface, and they had the novel experience of dashing ahead on the crests of the waves. Presently a large steamship was sighted some distance away. Frank resolved to turn aside and meet it to get water, as the store on board the water plane was fast diminishing.

But to the young inventor's surprise the steamer suddenly turned and made off in another direction, as though wishing to avoid them.

Frank keenly scanned her deck with a powerful glass, very much astonished at the actions of those in command of the vessel. But presently he exclaimed, in startled tones:

"There is trouble on board that steamer, and it looks very much to me as if it might be a mutiny. At any rate, I'm going to overhaul her and see."

He put the water plane at full speed, and the wonderful vessel flew through the water in pursuit of the steamer. She looked very much like a British trader, and seemed to be heavily freighted.

There was a wonderful amount of speed in her, but the marvellous velocity of the water plane soon lessened the distance between them.

"By Jove!" declared Matt Middleton, "I'll be blowed ef I ever see'd anything like this afore! This 'ere's ther trimmest craft afloat, an' I'm a lubber ef ever I'll claw in a bit o' canvas on a yard es long's I kin skim ther sea wi' ther b'ilin' astarn as high's wot we're a-havin' now!"

Within a quarter of an hour the water plane shot up alongside of the steamer, upon the stern of which the name "Reindeer" was painted.

"Ahoy, there, 'Reindeer'!" shouted Frank.

"Ship ahoy!" came a coarse reply.

"Haul to!" shouted Frank. "I want to board you!"

"Go to the deuce!" advised a tall, bearded individual, appearing with a revolver in his hand at the bulwark.

"What is the matter on board that craft?" demanded Frank.

"None o' yer business!" was the gruff, ungracious reply.

"I see weapons scattered about, wounded men lying in the gangways, and bound men crowded forward. Explain it, sir!"

"Now, ye'd jest best veer off!" the bearded man exclaimed, with an ugly leer, "or we'll gi' ye a dose o' medicine as'll make yer sick!"

"I order you to haul to and show your colours!"

"Werry good, stranger. An' here they is!"

He waved his hand, a gangway port swung open, and several men shoved out the muzzle of a fairly large gun such as are still carried in merchant ships sailing certain seas.

"Help, help!" shouted a half-smothered voice just then.

"Hallo!" cried Frank.

"Save me! Mutiny, and—oh!"

A cry of pain finished the sentence abruptly, and the voice ceased.

"That settles it!" said Frank. "I suspected as much. We must tackle those fellows from above. They are evidently bound for some of the isles—New Caledonia, or perhaps Sydney."

He sent the water plane up into the air again, and, describing a graceful circle, hovered a few hundred feet above the deck of the "Reindeer," when he kept her going along with the steamer. They then had a good view of the deck of the vessel, and saw that there had been a sanguinary fight there. Many wounded men lay about in various postures, there were smashed articles lying strewn around, broken doors and windows, and everything was in confusion.

"Pomp, bring out some hand grenades!" ordered Frank.

"Yah, yah!" said the darkie, foreseeing a fracas.

He did as he was ordered, and Frank left the wheel in Barney's hands, went to the rail, and shouted:

"'Reindeer' ahoy!"

"Wot d'yer want?" the bewhiskered man shouted.

"I want you all to go down in the fore-castle."

"We dunno who yer are, or what yer are, but we won't go below!"

"Then I will drive you in!"

And, so saying, he dropped one of the grenades down. It struck the deck near the men and exploded. There ascended a chorus of wild yells, and Frank saw the men scatter and run across the deck.

Down went another grenade after them, bursting with a loud detonation on the deck, and one by one the men dashed into the fore-castle companionway and down the stairs.

Once they were all down in the fore-castle Frank lowered the water plane to the tops of the steamer's masts and dropped a long rope ladder over the side.

"I'll go down upon her deck," said he to Harry Howard, "and open the cabin door, which I see is barricaded. If those fellows pitch into me fire down at them."

Frank supplied the doctor, Matt, Pomp, Harry, and Flush with repeating-rifles, armed himself with a brace of revolvers, and descended the rope ladder to the now deserted deck. Near the mainmast he observed a fine-looking man lying on the deck intently watching all his movements.

"What is the matter on board here?" he asked the man.

"There has been a mutiny. I am the captain," said the man. "My crew revolted under the leadership of my rascally first mate. We were bound from San Francisco to Hong Kong with a very valuable cargo. Half my men joined in the enterprise to seize the steamer, run her to Australia, sell her and the cargo there, and then disband. We resisted the plotters. Some of us were mortally wounded. The rest are locked up in the cabin. I have a bad wound and am bound hand and foot. They mean to kill us."

"Not if I can help it!" replied Frank. "Here, let me cut your bonds."

He did so, and the alleged captain rose and picked up a pistol.

"I will liberate my men," said he. "You have driven the mutineers into the fo'castle, I perceive. Lock the door while I free my men, and the tables will be turned on the miscreants."

"Go ahead! If those fellows molest us, my friends up on the water plane will fire down at them."

A gleam of triumph shone in the man's eyes and he staggered towards the cabin aft, while Frank hurried up forward to secure the door of the fore-castle. As he came near it, though, the men he had driven under shelter came scrambling out, and in a twinkling he found himself confronted by an array of rifles.

"So you've come down, eh?" asked the bearded man.

"Yes. Order your men to stack arms."

"What for?"

"Look up and you will see."

"Ah! Your men hes got us covered, eh?"

"Six of you die the moment you attack me!"

"What did yer le' that feller free fer?"

"To save his friends and capture the ship."

"Then you're a-helpin' him, eh?"

"Of course I am!"

"By thunder, you'll pay fer it, then! Go fer him, boys!"

A hoarse cry came from the men, and while several of them rushed across the deck to intercept the man whom Frank had liberated the rest rushed at the youth.

Bang, bang, bang! came a volley from above. The sailors paused in dismay. Frank hung up his hands, turned pale, and reeled back.

"By heavens!" he groaned, in agonised tones. "One of my friends has shot me instead of these villains!"

He clapped his hand to his head and fell to the deck, half-stunned by a flying bullet. But even as he fell he caught sight of Jack Flush peering down at him, and there was a diabolical grin upon his face. Then the young inventor's senses fled.

The cruise of the water plane might have been brought to an end very suddenly had the villain's shot penetrated Frank's brain.

It was luckily but a furrow alongside of his head that caused the young inventor's senses to leave him, and when he came to consciousness again he was amazed to see the man he had set free a prisoner again.

Moreover, Dr. Vaneyke and Barney stood beside him, they having descended from the water plane. At the other side of the deck he saw the men who had been menacing him.

Staggering to his feet he felt for his pistol, pointed at the men, and cried, eagerly:

"There they are! I'm glad you came to my aid. Drive the rascals down into the fore-castle again!"

"Hold on, Frank!" interposed the doctor, restraining him. "These men are not the mutineers. They are the loyal crew, and the rascal you liberated was the ringleader of the mutineers. He deceived you. The villains are all locked up in the cabin. He was just about to release them and renew the trouble when he was stopped in the nick of time. Isn't it so, sir?"

The bearded man nodded and smiled.

"I am the real captain," said he. "There seems to have been a mistake all round. Not knowin' yer or yer strange craft, we steamed off, an' yer came towards us in sich a queer way we thought yer might be a pirate, as we hearn tell about, which is cruisin' these waters in a strange-lookin' craft."

"We have injured some of your men, then?"

"Well, yer wasn't ter be blamed fer it."

"I'm sorry. You had your enemies subdued when we gave you pursuit, I see. Can we aid you any now?"

"Not a bit. We've saved ther ship."

"Then we will leave you."

Frank and the others mounted the ladder to the water plane after a desultory conversa-

tion with the gruff captain, and the invention sped away again through the air.

"It is singular," said Frank, as the "Reindeer" was left hull down on the horizon astern, "that one of you should have taken the trouble to shoot at me."

"No, no!" said the doctor. "We each picked our man, Frank. A flying bullet must have struck a bit of ironwork, glanced off, and wounded you. That is certainly the only way in which you could have been injured."

"Well, I suppose it must be as you say, doctor, for none of you would have any object in trying to kill me."

Jack Flush was the most concerned and most solicitous about the young inventor.

"Do not be too anxious about me, Flush," said Frank, drily. "Your face haunts me now. After I felt the bullet and fell, I glanced up and saw your face peering down at me with the most fiendish grin upon it I ever beheld. You may have done it."

"You wrong me, Mr. Reade," humbly said the man, in injured tones, and he walked away, simulating an air of angry innocence.

That night the "Greyhound" passed over the Fiji and Friendly Islands, and on the following morning was going between the New Hebrides and New Caledonia.

If no accident occurred before the next morning Frank calculated upon being above the Australian continent.

About noonday Frank and the doctor stood on the forward deck conversing, and Harry Howard was steering the water plane, when there sounded a crash down in the engine-room, the door flew open, and out on deck rushed Barney and Pomp, pursued by Jack Flush. The dark-faced stranger was in a fearful passion, his black eyes balefully glaring, the veins on his forehead swollen, and a malignant expression contorting his features. In his hand he clutched his revolver, and as he rushed across the deck after the negro and the Irishman he aimed the weapon at the latter and fired. The bullet whistled by Barney's ear in dangerous proximity.

"Howly schtuff!" shouted O'Shea, in alarm. "I'm murdered!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Frank, springing towards him.

"Faith, it wor on'y a bit ov a practical joke, sor!" gasped Barney. "Me an' Pomp towld him to turn wan ov ther thumb-screws ov ther accumulator-jars, an' it gave him ther devil's own shock."

"I'll kill you for your fooling with me!" the enraged man yelled, unable to subdue his anger.

He aimed the pistol at Barney's head point-blank, and was going to pull the trigger, when the Irishman dropped to the deck, and Frank struck the aeronaut a blow on the arm that knocked the pistol from his hand.

The blow was so powerfully dealt that it

sent Flush's arm in towards his face, and Frank's fist struck the fellow a stinging punch on the nose. A cry of rage burst from his lips.

"What!" he cried, in frenzied, choking tones. "You—dare—strike—me!"

He sprang at Frank with the savage ferocity of a tiger, caught him up in his arms, and rushed to the port railing, raising the young inventor high up over his head with almost supernatural strength.

"I'll hurl you down to perdition!" hissed the half-maddened man. "I'll wipe out that blow with your life!"

And, drawing himself together, he drew back the sustained figure of Frank, summoned up all his strength, and made an effort to hurl him from the water plane far out and down into that black, yawning abyss below.

CHAPTER 5.

May Bertram to the Rescue.—The Villain Exposed.—One Chance of Life.

FOR an instant Frank's body trembled in the air over the desperate man's head. The young inventor was so much amazed at this sudden, deadly onslaught that he was rendered powerless for an instant.

Every one of the spectators on deck, too, were half-paralysed with horror and consternation, and could not move hand or foot to render Frank their assistance.

Bang!

"Oh!" came from Jack Flush, in agonised tones.

Bang!

"I am shot!" cried Flush, again, and he staggered backward.

"Drop him! Drop him, or I'll put a bullet in your heart!"

It was May Bertram who spoke, and she stood in the doorway of the cabin aft, with a smoking revolver clutched in her tiny hand.

But her injunction was hardly needed, for the shots were aimed true and had lodged in Flush's body. He tottered, dropped Frank to the deck, and fell. In an instant the rest recovered from their stupor, and Frank bounded to his feet.

Jack Flush lay upon the deck groaning d'smally, and they all ran over to the wretch, Dr. Vaneyke bending over him to examine his wound.

"Stand back!" the man raved. "Don't touch me! Don't come near me! My maledictions upon all of you!"

"May Bertram," exclaimed Frank, "I owe you my life!"

"It is lucky I'm a crack shot and saw his intention in time, or you would have fallen lower and gone up higher than you are now," smiled the merry girl.

"What!" shouted Flush, painfully raising himself up on his arm. "You—you—May

Bertram—you shot me? Oh, I did not dream that you were capable of it!"

"You murderous fiend, I should have killed you!"

"Blow my brains out now! It would be a pleasure to me to die at your fair hand. Kill me, I say!"

He tore open the neck of his shirt, but the girl turned away from him with a look of disgust, and walked slowly to her cabin, Harry Howard accompanying her until she was safe inside.

"The villain received but one of the bullets," said Dr. Vaneyke, after a cursory examination, "and the wound in the side is not necessarily fatal. Yet it might confine him to bed."

"And a good place to keep him, in lieu of a prison," declared Frank.

Flush came to a sudden realisation of what he had done, and it made him feel very uneasy.

To repair the damage as much as possible he held out a hand towards Frank, and cried, contritely:

"Mr. Reade, for Heaven's sake, forgive me! I was blinded with fury and lost control of myself!"

"Hang ther durned swab!" interposed Middleton.

"No. I will set him aground as soon as we touch the coast of Australia," declared Frank.

Jack Flush snapped his teeth together viciously, picked up his revolver from the deck, bounded to his feet, forgetting his wound, and aimed the weapon at Frank.

"If you are going to cheat me out of going on this trip I'll get even with you!" he exclaimed.

He dropped a small packet of papers from his pocket as he rose, and Harry Howard picked them up and glanced at them. The next instant the rogue fired point-blank at Frank.

The bullet struck the young inventor over the heart, but to Jack Flush's amazement the youth burst out laughing.

"Shoot again!" said Frank, carelessly.

The other took deliberate aim once more and fired again. The bullet struck close to the other, and Frank moved as if about to fall.

"That settles you!" hissed Flush.

"Not at all. Fire again!" said Frank, calmly, recovering himself. "I wear a vest of chain mail. Seize him, boys! We will throw the scoundrel off the ship down into the sea, as he designed to do with me. That's no more than he deserves."

"No, no! Mercy!" yelled the shivering wretch, falling down on his knees before Frank frantically, and holding up his clasped hands as Barney and Pomp seized him in a powerful grip.

"Why, Frank," exclaimed Howard, at this juncture, "the fellow just dropped this

package, and, by all that is wonderful, it contains the original maps and papers relating to the mountain of gold, stolen from you at Readestown before we started on this voyage!"

Jack Flush turned deathly pale.

"Then he must be the thief!" exclaimed Frank.

The rascal saw that the game was lost, and in his desperation he bounded forward and cried, recklessly:

"Ay, I did steal them! I am doomed, as I may as well confess. Put back the black beard on me, and who would I be?"

"Ralph Despard!" cried Harry, in terrified tones.

"Yes," shouted the rascal, with a sardonic grin, "I am Ralph Despard. I am your hated enemy. May Heaven punish you all! I've fooled you all along. Now, do your worst! Kill me—torture me if you like! I hate you all! Now is the time for your vengeance. My time will come!"

He glared at them with blazing eyes, and a shudder convulsed them. He looked like a demon suddenly broken loose from the infernal regions in the intensity of his diabolical rage.

Barney and Pomp had been shaken off, but they sprang at the infuriated man and caught him again with a vice-like grip.

"We must get rid of the wretch," said Frank, sternly. "He has not killed anyone yet, despite his violent attempts to do so; but he certainly would were he given a chance. I therefore propose that we give him one chance to save his miserable life."

"What do you propose to do, Frank?"

"Force him to jump from this ship into the sea."

Ralph Despard's countenance fell. At first he imagined he was to be spared. But now that hope was ruthlessly taken from him.

"But where is his chance for escape?" asked the doctor.

"We can furnish him with a life-preserver. He may survive. A passing ship may pick him up, or he may drift ashore. No matter how the case may be, he will at least have that once chance left to save his miserable carcase. Is it agreed?"

"Ay. That, then, shall be his sentence."

"Here, Barney!" exclaimed Frank. "You and Middleton lead this wretch to the star-board side. Pomp, you procure a life-preserver for him, and, doctor, if you will lower the water plane a trifle, this beast will not break his neck or die for the want of breath when he leaps from the ship."

Despard's courage forsook him at the crisis, and he whined and prayed and yelled for mercy like a madman. But Frank was remorseless, and when Barney and Middleton had dragged him to the bulwarks Pomp thrust a life-preserver into his hand, and Frank drew his own revolver.

Seeing that all hope was gone Despard's mood changed.

"A million curses on you!" he yelled. "I shall live! I shall avenge myself. The day will come when I will make you pay for this crime! I shall track you down, and when we meet again may Heaven have mercy on you, for I won't!"

"Jump!" exclaimed Frank, levelling his pistol at him—"jump, or I will fire and blow your brains out!"

The water plane had descended to within a hundred feet of the sea. And, with a parting groan lingering upon his swollen lips and a horrible look in his bloodshot eyes, Despard uttered a yell of terror, bounded up on the railing, and sprang off.

Down to the sea hurled his body, and, striking the waves, it sank like a shot.

* * * * *

Before dawn of the next day the eastern seaboard of the continent of Australia was discerned, and the aerial navigators beheld that vast extent of territory, into the unknown heart of which they were to penetrate on their strange voyage in search of the mountain of gold.

Twenty-four hours later they had passed over New South Wales into Queensland, and were approaching the little explored interior of the great continent.

Two days went by, during which, deluded by the appearance of the McDonnell range of mountains, Frank was put on a false trail, and only found out his error after a long, useless search.

It was after that, when Mount Freeling led him off on another false track, and when this discouragement was overcome, they finally pursued Reynold's range to the northward, and came in sight of the lofty peak of Mount Steward.

They were in sight of their goal at last. The country was poor, with hillocks and fields of spinefex. There were some nutmeg, ginger, banana, and other plants, and a singular rock of conglomerate two miles long was met, with a spring of water in its centre, at which they replenished their almost emptied casks ere going on to the mountain.

Different kinds of wombats, phalangers, kangaroos, and bandicoots were seen, but not a bushman was encountered until the water plane settled down at the base of the mountain.

The air-vessel crashed into a dense mass of tangled scrub, covering many acres, when out from the thorny weeds started several native men and boys.

There were a few evergreen trees near by, under which the savages had been operating one of their native rites. They were short, dirty people, wearing nothing but a cloak of matting, open at the right-hand side, while their headgear was simply bunches of feathers or tails of animals, and their chests and backs

were tattooed and scored by rows of hideous raised scars.

They were all armed with boomerangs, a peculiar curved blade of wood, so constructed and thrown that it returned to its owner. Besides these they had hatchets of stone, and javelins pointed with bone.

Strong believers in witchcraft, the bushmen prostrated themselves near the water plane, crying: "Budda! Budda!" they thought it was their sleeping god come to destroy them.

"They imagine the ship is their deity," said the doctor.

"What disgusting fellows!" gasped May Bertram.

"Just see what hovels they are dwelling in," said Frank.

The mia-mias (huts) were hardly fit abodes for pigs, and that the savages were cannibals of a particularly revolting description was evidenced by a number of human bones which lay about their village.

A few moments afterwards the natives crept shudderingly away in the scrub brush and disappeared, but within an hour they returned, followed by an army of fully a hundred, and standing upon a distant hillock they viewed the water plane, and for the first time saw the white men.

That aroused their suspicions, and a few moments afterwards a shower of boomerangs came whistling through the air. One of the weapons struck Pomp a violent blow that knocked him over, and his body striking against the shoulder of May Bertram, she was suddenly knocked from the deck over the railing down to the ground. She uttered a shriek of dismay as she fell, and Harry darted forward to save her, but he was too late.

Frank was just in the act of lowering a rope-ladder over the side to go down to the girl's assistance, when the bushes beside her parted, and one of the blacks darted out and seized her. In an instant he sprang into the bushes with the half-stunned girl and vanished.

"Save her, save her!" shouted Howard, frantically, as he rushed to the ladder. "They may kill and devour her."

With one bound he was off the deck, and he had hardly landed when he dashed in amid the thick bushes in pursuit of the native who had abducted the girl he loved.

"Madman!" muttered Frank, aghast. "They will destroy him!"

Then he suddenly shouted:

"Barney, Pomp! Procure weapons quick! Doctor Vaneyke and Middleton remain to guard the ship!"

"Hurroo, for a ruction!" cried Barney, as he and Pomp rushed out, armed to the teeth, and carrying Frank's weapons.

An instant later the three went over the side.

CHAPTER 6.

The Blood-red Rock.—A Fight for Life Against Savage Dwarfs.—Despard Among the Giants.

INTO the bushes dashed Frank and his two friends in pursuit of the Australians, who left a well-defined trail. The tall jungle-grass towered above their heads and was thick with nardoo berries and sharp thorns.

A series of wild, savage cries coming from ahead of Frank, apprised him that some trouble was occurring, and this suspicion was manifested when upon bursting into a clearing he saw Harry Howard struggling with several of the natives.

Bang! bang! went Frank's revolver, and as both shots wounded two of the blacks, it sent the whole pack rushing away, screaming with pain and fear.

"After them!" shouted Howard. "They have got May!"

"Hold on!" cried Frank, as Howard started to run off in pursuit of his enemies. "It will do no good. They are better acquainted with travelling through this tangled brush than we are and can easily double on us. By sending the water plane aloft we shall be able to locate their village and thus stand a better chance of saving the girl."

"Very well, Reade. I will abide by what you suggest," was Howard's reluctant answer, and he followed Frank, Barney, and Pomp back to the water plane.

Once on board no time was lost in sending the vessel a dozen yards up in the air, the doctor navigating her, while all the rest crowded up in the bow with their weapons in readiness.

"We are going in the right direction to find the trail leading to the city of gold, too," said Frank.

"Thar's a beacon as we must take our bearin's by," said Matt Middleton, "an' that are the blood-red rock which'll show us our course along the dried-up bed o' a stream o' water leadin' aloft on ther mountain ter ther second guidin' mark. Then's when our troubles'll begin."

"Our troubles?" questioned Frank.

"Ay, ay, sir. We'll be in a section wot's thick with dwarfs—leetle bits o' fellers as ugly as sin an' twice as nasty. They range all about a big rock in ther shape o' a man's head. At that rock thar's a pass over a chasm, an' that's ther only spot whar it kin be crossed afoot."

"How is that?"

"It's a natural stone bridge."

"But how about flying over the chasm?"

"I hopes as it kin be done, sir. I've hearn tell o' ther roarin' fire what's a-comin' aloft from that 'ere pit is awful—a terrible blaze allers a-shootin' skyward, an' ther heat so

powerful yer can't git nowhere near it 'ceptin' by goin' over that bridge I mentioned afore."

"And once we do get over?"

"It's jist as bad, for we'll be in a sort o' island kivered wi' rock an' little vegetation, an' it's peopled by a band o' giants wot guards that buried city. If we manage ter git ther best o' them we'll have to pass through a den o' wild beasts ter git in ther city o' gold."

"The obstacles are greater than I imagined."

"Ay, sir, but the paymint'll be as great."

"Ah! What is that?" exclaimed Howard.

He pointed ahead excitedly, and they saw that the tall grass was violently agitated by some moving bodies within it, which certainly must have been the blacks.

"We are close on to them now," said Frank.

On fled the "Greyhound," when, with a sibilant hiss, a number of javelins shot up from amid the tall grass towards her, the flinty points striking the hull.

"Fools!" muttered Frank. "Give them a shot, Harry."

"With pleasure! Ah—look at that fellow!"

It was an ugly-looking wretch who was just in the act of hurling a boomerang that Harry singled out down in the grass. There came a wild howl of dismay from the man as the bullet struck him, and, as he flung up his arms and fell to the earth, Harry remarked:

"He was the fellow who stole May Bertram. But someone must have taken her from him."

The water plane passed over him, and a moment later was above the others, but the white men saw no sign of the girl in their midst, even by the aid of a telescope.

"I'll find out what has become of her," said Frank, as he shouted to the doctor to slacken speed.

He picked up a rope, made a noose in the end, and, as they went along after the scared and running blacks, he singled out the most convenient man, and, awaiting his opportunity, he dropped the noose down so adroitly that it fell over his shoulders. A sudden jerk at the lasso, and the black was thrown over, then hauled up, screaming with fear.

For a moment he swung beneath the "Greyhound" like the pendulum of a clock, and then Pomp and Barney hauled him up on deck, where they quickly bound him.

Barney ran in to relieve the doctor, and when the old scientist came out on deck he questioned the negro in an Australian dialect as to what had become of May. The frightened black did not understand him, for the very good reason that there are hundreds of dialects among the natives, some tribes living within a few miles of others not being able to understand a single word of each other's language.

A symbolical form of questioning was then resorted to, and after much difficulty they managed to elicit the dismaying information that runners had been sent on ahead with the girl up the mountain to a tribe of dwarfs that dwelt there.

They then tried to ascertain what was to be done with the girl, but the man stubbornly refused to reveal this. Seeing that no further information could be gained from him he was locked up in an empty state-room.

"We can only keep on as we are going," said Frank, "and make an effort to find the dwarfs and rescue her."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Matt Middleton, excitedly, "I see through it now! They are a-goin' ter take her up ter ther fiery chasm, 'cause that's whar them dwarfs are!"

He pointed ahead, and cries of wonder burst from the rest as they saw what he pointed at.

"The blood-red rock!" cried Frank.

"Ay, ay, sir—the one mentioned in that 'ere old manuscript!"

"Then the story is finding foundation in proof," said the doctor, gravely, "and the treasure must be no myth."

The rock was a square wall, fully one hundred feet in height, standing alone amid the boulders, and the sun was shining directly and fully upon it from the south.

"But that strange crimson colour?" said Frank. "It seems to move!"

"My dear boy," said the professor, with a smile, "it glistens too, doesn't it? Well, the colour you see is simply formed by millions of red ants that swarm over that rock and dwell in it, and it is the sun's rays slanting upon their bodies you see."

The "Greyhound" passed the rock and then went up the mountain, over the bed of a dried-up river, on her errand of mercy.

* * * * *

A wild, piercing shriek of terror pealed out on the clear midday air, and it sent a chill of horror to the hearts of the anxious listeners on the deck of the water plane.

They were going through dense forests, over streams, and through fearful jungles, the great mountain towering up thousands upon thousands of feet above them, its peak protruding through the clouds.

Everything at a certain height had begun to change from the beautiful verdure and fragrant flowers to a gnarled, rough, and barren rocky aspect. The "Greyhound" had gone into a dark and forbidding-looking gorge, when that appalling shriek was borne on the breeze to the ears of the navigators, who were watching so anxiously on deck.

"Put on more power, Barney!" shouted Frank.

"It was the voice of May!" groaned Howard.

"And it came from ahead," added the doctor.

Along shot the "Greyhound" at redoubled speed as Barney pulled the lever out, and a few moments later the water plane dashed from the gorge into a huge circular basin, a mile in diameter, with towering, cliff-like walls rising all around its flat bed.

Within this place they saw nearly a thousand men.

But such creatures! Not one of the ugly little beings was over four feet in height, their pigmy bodies wrapped in grass matting, and everyone of them armed with weapons similar to those carried by the bigger natives.

In their midst were two ordinary-sized men, and the whole crowd, bearing a burden of some kind in their midst, were rushing towards an incline that led up to the top of the cliffs surrounding the basin.

"They are a-veerin' off fer ther stone bridge as crosses ther fiery chasm!" declared Matt Middleton. "Yer ha' ter cross this 'ere place ter reach it, an' them coves seems as if about ter tack across ter starboard. Better overhaul 'em, sir."

The atmosphere below had been very hot, and they expected it would become cooler as they ascended the mountain; but such was not the case. On the contrary, it seemed to be hotter where they were than it had been at the base of the mountain.

The "Greyhound" dashed ahead, and the navigators were suddenly brought into view of a sight that almost froze the blood in their veins.

At the crest of the cliffs there was a vast opening in the ground, from which ever and anon great gusts of sulphuric smoke were blown skyward, to be followed by sudden bursts of vivid flames. The great fiery tongues flared up for an instant, then sank down out of sight again, only to reappear as soon as the next burst of smoke came.

The edges of the yawning chasm had a dry, baked look, and a vast line of dancing heat could be seen playing above the enormous pit, to mark the immeasurable amount of torrid air above the crater.

The chasm ran in a circle, and across it a wide, natural bridge of solid stone joined both sides of the abyss by a link which even the fire could not overcome. In the middle of this bridge the dwarfs had come to a pause with the white girl, and those upon the "Greyhound" saw that they were drawing down the branch of a thick sapling of palm, it requiring fully fifty of them to hold the springy pole bent.

Frank's face turned pale.

"By jingo!" he gasped, "they are going to use that sapling as a catapult to hurl the bound girl far out into that volcano's crater!"

"Great Heaven!" groaned Howard, wringing his hands in anguish. "Can't we reach her in time to save her?"

"Perhaps. I hope so, at least!"

Barney had seen what was transpiring, and pulled the propeller-lever out, sending the water plane ahead faster.

"The crowd is scattering—they are almost ready," said the doctor.

"We can't reach them in time," said Frank.

"Don't say that, Reade! Oh, don't say that!"

"Can nothing be done?"

"There is one last desperate resort—the electric gun!"

"Try it."

Frank dashed downstairs, and had the gun—his own invention—up on deck in a twinkling, connected with his dynamo.

He glanced keenly at the fiendish dwarfs, and saw that they had fastened the sapling end down to a rock, and were placing the girl's figure upon the trunk where it forked at the juncture of the branches.

A man stood by with a knife in his hand to cut the thong that held the sapling to the rock. This would release it, and the girl would be shot up into the air to descend in the fiery crater.

Frank had hardly turned the piece to bear on the dwarfs when they all scattered, exposing the prostrate figure of the bound girl secured to the sapling. The dwarf with the knife sprang towards her to cut the lashings, and Howard, overcome with horror, fell fainting to the deck of the "Greyhound."

Aiding the young inventor as much as he could by the skilful management of the "Greyhound," Barney kept the vessel as steady as a rock on her course.

"Watch that chap with the knife, doctor," said Frank, as he sighted the gun.

Whiz! went the gun ever as he was speaking. The lightning-bolt had no sooner been released from the gun when it struck the knife and glanced up the dwarf's arm to his head. There was a vivid flash, an explosion, and the man fell dead upon the spot.

A shout of horror and amazement came from the rest upon beholding his fate, but so determined were the dwarfs to carry out their purpose that no sooner had the little scoundrel fallen when another sprang forward, armed with a stone hatchet to sever the rush thong.

Whiz! went a second barrel of the electric gun.

Once more a flash at the man's head, a violent concussion, and a second dwarf was instantly killed.

"Drive them back with a volley!" said the scientist.

Frank then touched the press-button on the breech of the gun again and again, the barrels revolving and every bolt dealing destruction in the midst of the fleeing dwarfs.

The blacks, realising that death threatened them in an awful form if they remained there any longer, took to their heels and fled across

the bridge, leaving the unconscious girl lying where she was.

Within a few moments the water plane hovered above her, a ladder went over the side, Frank descended, and, cutting her bonds, he lifted her up from the unbearably hot rock.

A wild chorus of cries from the dwarfs assailed his ears, and, hastily glancing over his shoulder, he was surprised to see them come rushing back towards him. He made a dash for the rope ladder, hoping that the doctor would fire a few shots at them from the gun; but the old scientist, not understanding the mechanism, in his endeavour to hastily do so, disarranged some of the complex wires and rendered the gun useless.

Upon seeing how he had bungled the matter he called upon the others to pour down a fire on the dwarfs from their rifles. This was done just as the pigmies were closing in on Frank, who was totally unarmed save for a revolver in his hip-pocket, and several of their number fell killed and wounded; yet it did not deter the determined little wretches from continuing the pursuit.

The doctor came down the ladder to Frank's aid and took the girl from his arms, when the "Greyhound," moving forward a few yards, the dwarfs crowded between the ladder and Frank, and the doctor had to ascend with May to the water plane, as he was rendered powerless to help Frank, encumbered as he was by the dead weight of the unconscious girl.

Left alone, Frank was surrounded by the dwarfs, and the people on the water plane above dared not fire at those nearest to him for fear of hitting him by accident.

Hundreds of them assailed the youth in a body, the stunted little rascals screaming in shrill tones; and, attacking him from all sides, they climbed up on his body and sought by every means to get him down on the ground. Some tried to pull his legs from under him, others tried to trip him, a few tried unitedly to push him over, and several of them savagely thrust their javelins at him.

Frank caught one of the persistent little blacks by his thin legs, and, using him as a club, he knocked several down and fought his way out of the circle.

"If Barney would only come down!" he muttered.

Crack! came a violent blow on the back of Frank's head just then from a boomerang.

He staggered for a moment and fell on his knees, half-stunned, when, with a yell, a dozen of the stunted little vagabonds fell upon him and bound him hand and foot.

Shot after shot had been coming down in the midst of the dwarfs from those upon the "Greyhound," and they returned the fire with showers of missiles, many of which fell upon the deck of the drifting water plane. But the moment Frank was captured the

savages scattered, three-quarters of them dashing ahead across the bridge, and the remainder crowding so closely about Frank that they could not be shot at without risk of the young inventor being hit.

The ones who crossed the bridge vanished among the rocks on the other side, and those holding Frank carried him over, the water plane following them like a shadow.

In the hands of his insignificant-looking enemies Frank could not move hand or foot, and was forced to quietly submit to being conveyed wherever they pleased to take him.

Faster moved the dark-skinned crowd, and they soon reached the other side of the bridge, an occasional shot coming down from the "Greyhound," dropping a man on the way, and eliciting a wild howl of fury from the rest.

It was a singular place to which Frank was being carried, and the glances he cast around showed him a dearth of vegetation, a vast area of rugged rocks, and a large tract of coarse, red sand stretching off at one side.

Presently they came to the ruins of a massive wall, at one side of which Frank saw an enormous rock, rising fully fifty feet from the earth, crudely carved into the shape of a man's head.

"The entrance to the buried city of gold!" he muttered, in amazement.

The dwarfs had hardly passed the opening in the wall when the "Greyhound" suddenly swept down towards the earth.

At the same juncture a band of giant blacks, between six and seven feet in height, suddenly appeared before the dwarfs. Their ranks parted, and a white man appeared from their midst.

Frank looked up at him, then an exclamation of amazement burst from his lips.

"Ralph Despard!" he cried, hardly able to credit his senses.

"At your service, and master of the situation!" said the ex-balloonist—for he it was—and he smiled like a demon.

CHAPTER 7.

In a Den of Horrors.—A Fight for Life.— The City of Gold.

THE one chance for life which Frank had given the rogue, Despard, by jumping into the sea, had come the villain's way. He had been picked up by a ship and carried on to Sydney. Although he had lost the package of papers he had stolen from Frank Reade he had read them through so frequently that their contents were indelibly committed to his memory.

Losing no time in Sydney he purchased a good horse and equipments and set out with despatch for Central Australia. He had improved his time so well under the guidance of a Bushman that he reached the mountain of gold ahead of the airmen—who, as we

know, had lost their way more than once—and had penetrated as far as the land of the giants.

Enlisting the friendship of the giants by apprising them of Frank's coming to wrest their treasure from them, he promised to save their hidden city from the invader, arguing to himself that he could thereby thwart Frank and have a most excellent opportunity of gaining some of the gold himself.

"You seem to very friendly with these black," said Frank.

"And I am," replied Despard. "I am leagued with them to exterminate you. In fact, I have proved my allegiance by joining their tribe. Look at the cavities of my two upper jaw teeth which they have extracted. That is one of their most solemn rites. It makes me their brother."

Just then a dark shadow over Despard's head caused him to hastily glance up, and he saw the water plane settling down. With cries of affright the giants darted in among the rocks, dragging Frank with them.

The "Greyhound" came to rest upon the ground, and Dr. Vaneyke with the others opened fire upon those of the blacks whom they could see.

Several of the giants fell.

"This must cease. We must capture the water plane!" hissed Despard to Frank, who lay on the ground near him.

"You cannot do it. My friends will save me," replied Frank.

"Bah! nothing is impossible. Murrumbidgee, the chief of this gang of giants, is a great man, and he fears you. They will fight like rats in a trap, because they know what you have come here for, and are very jealous of their treasure. I will impart a plan to him whereby we can capture your friends and pull out their fangs. Here is Calewatta, my guide and translator. I say, Calewatta, come here! I want you to talk to the chief for me."

The native approached.

"Tell the chief to cause a cross to be made of saplings. We will fasten this man to it, hold him in front of us, and approach the ship of the air. The men there will not dare to fire at us then, for fear of hitting this fellow. By that means we can get near enough to the vessel to make a dash and capture it. Do you understand?"

"I do," said Calewatta, in his sadly-broken English. "I will tell Murrumbidgee."

He hurried away, and presently the chief approached with several of his men, and Frank was secured to a plank and carried on ahead.

The dismay of those upon the "Greyhound" may be imagined when they saw that body of giants moving towards them, with Frank's body held up in front of them as a shield, and Ralph Despard in the lead with Chief Murrumbidgee.

The dwarfs had all gone away back over

the bridge, to seek the lower grounds of the mountain again, since their services were no longer needed.

"Fire at them with the electric gun!" shouted Frank, wrathfully, as the crowd drew near the water plane. "Never mind if you hit me. If you don't beat them off you are lost!"

"We can't—we don't understand it!" replied the professor.

"Pull the lever out at the side and touch the press-button."

"The lever? Ah! I did not notice it."

"Hurry!—hurry!"

"Shut up!" growled Despard, savagely.

"I won't!" retorted Frank, hotly. "I'm bound, but not helpless!"

"Shut up!" yelled the man, again, and he raised his clenched fist and struck Frank a violent blow on the mouth that drew blood.

While this was transpiring the blacks kept advancing towards the water plane in a solid body, and Barney, Pomp, Middleton, and Howard stood at the railing firing at them with their rifles every chance they got.

The doctor had gone to the electric gun, and after a short examination of it he found the means of operating the piece so that it would work properly.

Despard felt sure of an easy victory, when suddenly the old man of science pressed the button on the breech, and a lightning bolt shot from the gun and exploded in the midst of the giants with a loud detonation that struck terror to their hearts.

Again and again the gun belched its deadly missiles, and these were supplemented by a number of hand grenades flung by the others, that burst with the roar of artillery.

"Calewatta," shouted Despard, excitedly, "tell Murrumbidgee to retreat!"

Frank was dashed along with the fleeing blacks, followed by shot after shot from the water plane, and when the blacks were safely sheltered behind the rocks again Despard urged that Frank should be taken to the buried city and sacrificed. To this the chief readily assented.

Frank was thereupon released from the plank, and they carried him through the ruins to a great arched gateway of stone in the side of the mountain.

A huge wooden door was swung back upon its pivot, and the chief and Despard, followed by two blacks who carried Frank, passed through the opening into the darkness.

Torches were ignited, and they passed into an enormous cavern, the sides and roof of which could not be seen, so impenetrable was the gloom.

On they went a hundred yards or more in the gloom, and a second door was reached, opened, and they stepped into daylight.

They stood now in an enormous amphitheatre filled with the ruins of houses and temples—in a word it was the golden city.

Flung upon the ground, Frank was left to his fate, and the others hastily withdrew and closed the door again. Presently he arose to his feet and glanced around.

For an instant he saw nothing to arouse his alarm, but at this very fate he shuddered, for he knew that there was some fearful danger lurking around him, but did not know from what quarter to expect it.

Cliffs, almost smooth, arose all round, a mile in height, and these cliffs, presented the same strange, red appearance that the blood-red rock had shown, by which Frank inferred that armies of ants had taken possession of them in places.

Above soared several white eagles, and the ruins were infested by thousands of chattering parrots, and lyre-birds, honey-eaters, and plovers, while everything was overgrown by vines and weeds.

Frank's arms were bound behind his back, but his legs were unhampered, and he walked through the door of a temple.

The roof had fallen in, and a cry of amazement burst from his lips as he observed that the pillars of the place, the altar, and the jugs, dishes, fountains, and ornaments were made of gold, incrustated with precious stones.

But while he stood in admiration there came a terrific whirring, as if a thousand wheels were buzzing over his head, and an immense flock of huge vampire bats came down upon him.

They bit into his flesh, and then began to suck the life blood out of him with the voracity of utter starvation. The pain was so intense that he rolled over and over upon the littered floor.

He stood an excellent opportunity of being killed, but remembering that they could not see in daylight, he arose and rushed out into the street again, where he managed to brush those that remained away from his aching body.

No sooner was this done, though, when a loud yelping at every quarter of the city was heard, causing the birds to fly up into the air, uttering cries of affright, and out from every street came rushing pack after pack of dingoes, or wild dogs.

Frank fastened a look of dismay upon the snarling and snapping canines, and managed to back himself up against the side of a building.

He kicked at them, screamed at them, and sought by every means to drive the voracious beasts back, but without avail.

"I must reach some place out of their way," he thought, glancing around. "And the only place I can see is the inside of one of those stone buildings. I'll risk a dash!"

He could do nothing but spring into the midst of the howling pack, and they scattered for an instant, leaving him a clear path, along which he ran towards the doorway of one of the houses.

The whole pack came flying after him, and he ran with all his might, but not so fleetly as the dogs. Their howling, baying, and snapping so close at his heels was dreadful, and he was panting hard, lacerated by their teeth, and half-exhausted, by the time he reached the door and dashed into the house.

A stone staircase led him up to the second-storey, where he saw a lavish display of riches in golden cases and images; but a bitter smile of contempt crossed his face, for he knew that none of the wealth could purchase him immunity from the peril then menacing his life.

The dingoes came rushing up after him, and he stood guarding the top of the stairs for a minute, kicking the beasts down again. Finally he was forced to dart into one of the rooms.

The floor rocked and trembled a moment, then gave way. There followed a crash, and the next moment down it went with him and he was buried in the rotten debris with the senses knocked clean out of him.

How long Frank lay there he did not know, but when he revived with a splitting headache, the moon was shining in the starry sky, and the dogs had all disappeared.

When, later, he struggled out of the heap of debris, he found that the bonds that held his hands behind his back had been broken by his fall. He found a revolver in his hip-pocket, fortunately, and, stealing out of the house, he glanced around.

The street was alive with loathsome lizards and frogs with peculiar coloured bodies, some of the lizards being of the Monitor tribe, able to burrow, swim, climb, or hop like kangaroos, the reptiles measuring eight and nine feet in length, and possessing the singular power to change from light to dark, or from yellow to grey and red.

He had scarcely taken note of the obnoxious things when he saw the gateway open, and Ralph Despard appeared in the opening. He clutched a revolver in his hand, and peered around with a baleful look upon his face.

The moment his glance encountered Frank he started, and, raising his revolver, fired at the young inventor.

Frank was quick as he, however, and, without uttering a word, they exchanged three shots without stirring.

The first bullet missed Frank, the second hummed by his head, and the last tore a piece of cloth from his sleeve.

At the last shot Despard uttered a yell of agony, flung up his arms, and reeled back into the gateway; he would have fallen, but quickly recovered himself, and, darting through the gateway again, he vanished.

Frank made a complete tour of the desolate city. How he was to get out he did not know, nor could he subsist without food and water. He sat down dejectedly upon a rock

to turn the matter over in his mind, when a shadow fell athwart the street, and he glanced skyward.

Then his heart gave a great throb, for he saw the "Greyhound" soaring above him. He jumped up and discharged his revolver again and again.

The water plane came to a pause, and he saw Barney peering down over the railing, then the face of Harry Howard appeared.

They soon perceived him, and a moment afterwards the water plane came circling down towards the ground. Down she swooped like some huge bird of prey, until at last she settled near Frank.

All were delighted at Frank's providential escape when he had described his adventures, and when the young inventor had rested for a short time Middleton showed them where the best of the treasure was to be found.

They all set to work with a will to gather in the golden images, pillars, and ornaments, and within a comparatively short space of time they had the water plane half-loaded with an immense fortune.

It was just at this juncture that an interruption came in the form of Despard, who appeared at the gate, peered in and saw them at work, and, discharging his revolvers at them, he fled to arouse the blacks.

"We are discovered!" cried Frank. "Arm yourselves and prepare to defend the door."

"Once we get control of the door," said Harry Howard, as Barney rushed on board to secure their arms and some hand-grenades, and to prepare the electric gun, "we can hold it against an army."

"Can't we barricade it?" questioned the professor.

"No," replied Frank; "there are no means in this place—not a rock, and the composition of these old houses is so rotten it could not withstand anything."

He had hardly spoken when a wild, savage yell broke from the stillness, and in at the huge gate rushed Despard and a score of the blacks, while crowding behind them came an innumerable crowd.

"Barney, hurry up!" shouted Frank.

"Hurroo! I'm here!" came the cheerful reply, and, after hurling a stack of rifles over the side, the jolly Irishman flung a grenade into the midst of the in-rushing blacks, which exploded with a fearful report, dealing destruction to several of them.

Boom! boom! boom! roared another fusillade of the grenades from Barney's hands a moment later, and the echo had hardly died away when a rattling discharge from the rifles of Frank and the rest burst out as they drew up beside the "Greyhound."

There came an answering volley of arrows, boomerangs, spears, and hatchets from the bushmen, and the cries of the wounded and dying blacks sounded with mournful intonations above the din of the firing.

May Bertram had gone inside the water plane out of danger. Despite the deadly fire poured into their midst the giants did not waver, but kept pressing on, urged forward by Ralph Despard.

That renegade did not expose himself to the fire of the "Greyhound" men, but having incited the blacks, he carefully ensconced himself behind a sheltering ledge.

A heap of dead and wounded men began to blockade the entrance, and a few stragglers who succeeded in getting well within the fearful death-trap gate went off at an angle, but were instantly shot down.

The firing of the white men was so persistent and overwhelming that the giants at length were forced to retreat back through the gate, leaving fully two score of their number lying dead and wounded. Fortunately not one of the aerial adventurers was hurt.

Within a moment the place was vacant, none of the blacks but those injured in the fray remaining, nor could a sound be heard from them.

"Better pitch in again while we have a respite," said the doctor.

"Good!" assented Frank. "I will remain on deck at the electric gun, and protect you while you are busy."

Several times as the work progressed the gate was flung open, and a number of the yelling blacks dashed in; but a few of the deadly shots from the electric gun soon drove them back out of sight again.

The hold of the "Greyhound" was soon filled, and they were just about to end their work, when a cry from Frank brought them all rushing to the water plane.

"What is the matter, Reade?" demanded Harry Howard.

"Look up there!" replied Frank.

He pointed at the cliff-tops encircling the great basin, and as the others looked up they shuddered with horror, for the rocks were swarming with the blacks.

All around the city hundreds of the giants could be seen, and, as a sullen roar pealed from their throats, at a preconcerted signal they began to tear up the smaller rocks.

A moment afterwards the air became black with shower upon shower of the missiles, as they hurled them down into the city at the entrapped adventurers.

Boom! came a rock on the deck. It went through the thin planking like a cannon-ball, and fell into the hold.

The professor dashed over to the gun, and, elevating the barrels, sent shot after shot up at the men on the cliffs, while Frank, seeing that everything was in readiness for flight, pulled out the ascending lever.

But the water plane would not budge!

"She is overloaded! Throw over some of the gold! The weight is more than the planes have power to lift!"

Barney and Pomp gathered part of the golden freight, and when the "Greyhound" had been relieved of several hundred pounds of the gold, she slowly ascended to a height of fifty feet, and then remained stationary!

It was exasperating, and Frank called out:

"Over with more of it, boys! Hurry—hurry!"

His injunction was occasioned by seeing that, as he was nearer to the blacks, they had a better chance to hit the "Greyhound" with their rocks than they had before.

Down went several huge golden pillars and a large image of Buddai; and just as another immense shower of missiles came flying through the air, the "Greyhound" arose to a distance of seventy-five feet more, thus bringing her about twenty-five feet above the heads of the blacks.

They were shouting and dancing about frantically as they saw the water plane and her passengers eluding them, and sent volley after volley of their weapons up into the air at the invention, without doing it any damage.

"Holler, yer spalpeens!" shouted Barney, derisively, as he flung a grenade down at a crowd below the ship, which had begun to forge ahead as Frank put the propellers in motion.

"Lookar, dar, honey!" exclaimed Pomp, excitedly. "Wha' yo' call dat figger—huh? Ain't it Ralph Despard?"

"Faith it is that—an'—oh, howly schmoke!"

There came a sudden jar at the water plane, and Pomp cried:

"De drag-rope am down, an' dem niggahs wid whiskers done cotch hold ob it fo' shuah! See dar!"

It was a fact that the drag-rope had been down as they ascended, and a score of the bushmen and Ralph Despard caught hold of the rope as it swept along the ground close behind them, their clutch causing the violent jar which had been felt.

The "Greyhound" was brought to a sudden standstill by the weight thus brought to bear upon her. Frank saw what the trouble was, and pulled out the propeller lever to its fullest extent.

The ship suddenly darted ahead, and dragged the blacks along with it, as they clung tenaciously to the rope.

"Drop some grenades down among them!" shouted Frank.

"Wot's ther matther wid cuttin' ther rope?" demanded Barney, pulling out his knife eagerly.

"No! We can't afford to lose it."

"But, Masther Frank, shure some av thim is cloimbin' up."

"Is Despard on the rope yet?"

"He is that, foreninst ther others, an' up hoighest."

"And the fiery chasm is just ahead of us?"

"Is it a-roastin' he'll be afther gittin'?"

"Ay, and a good one, too! We'll gridiron him well."

Pomp came back just then with some grenades, and the deadly explosives were sent down into the midst of the blacks, who were trying to anchor the "Greyhound," creating such consternation among them that all but a couple let go their grip on the rope.

Relieved so suddenly of their weight, the water plane suddenly darted ahead, and Despard and the two others suddenly found themselves dangling at the end of the rope in the air.

Every instant they were carried higher and higher from the ground, and as the two blacks became cognisant of this fact they let go and fell; but Despard became frightened at the height at which he found himself, and held on.

Frank steered the water plane for the fiery chasm, up through which the volcanic flames were darting, and as they drew near it and Despard saw his danger he yelled wildly.

The next instant the water plane hovered over the fiery abyss. There came a wild shriek from Ralph Despard, his squirming body gave a convulsive whirl, his hands relaxed their hold, and down he fell into the yawning gulf below!

CHAPTER 8.

Captured by Outlaws.—Barney and Pomp on a Spree.—The Water Plane Sinking.

WITHIN an hour they had left the fiery crater far behind them, and at a distance of a thousand feet above the earth the "Greyhound" went ploughing along, with her precious burden of gold, all hands on board in a jubilant state.

They were heading straight for the Pacific seaboard in the direction of Queensland, where Frank hoped to strike the coast.

After supper Matt Middleton took his turn at the wheel.

The old sailor was half-wild with delight over the success of the voyage thus far, and as Frank entered the pilot-house for a few minutes' chat with him he said, emphatically:

"By jingo! Mr. Reade, thar don't 'pear ter be werry much lunacy in old Matt Middleton's yarns about ther treasures of ther mountain o' gold now, do they, sir?"

"Your story, Matt, was so wonderful," replied Frank, "that it was not surprising people discredited it. But we have substantially proved its truth, my boy, and the vast treasure on board the 'Greyhound' is bound to make somebody rich when we reach home again."

"Somebody?" echoed the old sailor, giving a hitch at his baggy trousers and spinning the wheel around. "Why, sir, everybody on board share an' share alike—ekal. That's

fa'r an' square, sir, an' that's ther programme."

"It shall be as you like, Matt."

The old sailor gave a grunt, then a start, then a yell.

"By jingo! what's that?" he cried.

There sounded a thunderous clap in the sky, and as Frank looked up he, too, started, and his face paled.

"It is an immense meteor just burst above us!" he cried, in alarmed tones. "And, see, Matt! There is an enormous fire-ball rushing through the atmosphere, leaving a trail of sparks behind it, and it is coming straight towards the water plane!"

The old sailor's hands relaxed their grasp of the wheel, and he sank down upon his knees, trembling with fear as his starting eyes became fastened upon the meteor.

With a whistling and roaring that would have made the spectator imagine that the world was coming to an end a tremendous ball of incandescent fire as big as a house split into a thousand fragments over the water plane, and the glowing, red-hot missiles came tearing through the sky directly towards the "Greyhound."

The young inventor saw the direct path of the splitting fire-ball, and he stopped the propellers and reversed their action in a flash.

The "Greyhound" came to a sudden pause and began to back, when, with a deafening roar, the meteor struck the ram on the prow, knocked it off, glanced outward, and then continued on to the earth, where it struck with a bang.

The shock sustained by the "Greyhound" had thrown her down bow foremost; but as she was diving towards the ground the propellers were reversed again by Frank, she shot forward, curved upward, and in a minute more she had risen to her former altitude.

Safe enough except for a fearful scorching and the loss of the ram at her bow, she flashed ahead once more with wonderful speed, and ere the shocked passengers fairly realised that they were in great danger they were out of it again.

All that night and the following day the water plane sped along over the Australian continent, no event of any consequence occurring to mar the tranquillity of the aerial voyagers on their homeward trip.

It was late in the afternoon when Frank stood aft, talking to Harry Howard and May Bertram, and the sun was declining over the western landscape.

"We are well over Queensland now, I calculate," he was saying. "for we have passed between the McKinlay and the Middleton mountain-ranges, are heading for the Bowen Downs, and, after we cross the Bel-yando and Sutter rivers, we will go over the Blue Mountains and reach Cumberland Island, this side of the Great Barrier Reefs. Then, ho! for an ocean voyage again!"

"Rather dangerous to venture out on the Pacific, burdened down as the 'Greyhound' is with the gold, isn't it?" asked Harry.

"Somewhat. But even if we should not be able to fly, the 'Greyhound,' being a water plane, is equally as good on the water, so our danger is considerably diminished on that score."

Matt Middleton kept the wheel, and the others all turned in.

Before daylight Frank was awakened by feeling Pomp shaking him, and started up in alarm as the darkie cried:

"Massa Frank, de water plane am fallin' down, sah!"

"What, the 'Greyhound' falling?" gasped Frank. "Are the accumulator-jars exhausted of their supply of electricity?"

"No, sah. De indicators am all right, sah."

"Then what is the cause of the trouble?"

"Dunno, sah. 'Spec's dat yo' fine dat out."

"Then, come! We will go down to the battery-room."

He hurriedly dressed himself and ran out on deck, where he saw that the water plane was drifting downward, Barney at the wheel, and the earth only five hundred feet below, a town or village of some kind several miles off, and a rolling, woodland country beneath the "Greyhound."

It occupied but an instant for Frank to get down in the battery-room, and he saw the automatic dynamo slowly working and keeping the jars stored with power.

The bearings of the helix uprights and the propeller driving-rod beds were properly lubricated, and none of the wires connecting the battery-cells was broken, nor was the insulation in any way imperfect in the room.

He observed, however, that the cable which passed through the dead-hole in the bulkhead was sagging, and that the chafing of the clustered wires on the edge of the woodwork was wearing off the rubber coating of the wires.

It was evident then that a wire had been broken between the pilot-house switchboard and the battery-room. In order to get at it Frank passed through a door in the bulkhead that led him into the hold, and the moment he entered the doorway he saw the broken wire hanging loosely from the cable, both ends emitting a bright shower of sparks constantly.

To repair the damage required that all the machinery should be stopped, for an attempt to mend it might result in a death-dealing shock, and Frank had no desire to run such long chances. Accordingly, with a frown of annoyance upon his brow, he went up on deck and told Barney to descend to the earth, and explained to him what had happened.

The Irishman pulled out a lever, and the "Greyhound" vol-planed down and landed in a large glen within a dense wood.

The landing aroused the others, and matters were explained to them, when Frank set about to repair the damage.

This was soon accomplished, but the young inventor did not know that the wire he substituted was badly insulated, and was destined to cause him a terrible lot of trouble in future.

"There is one thing very evident," he said to the others, when he came on deck again, "and that is that we are overloaded with gold and must abandon more of it if we wish to proceed."

"I noticed a village ahead o' our course, sor," said Barney, "an', shure, it's there we moight tur-r-n some ov it inter bank-notes."

"A good suggestion," said Frank; "but what we have we can't carry any further. Let us bury some of it in this glen. We may be able to come back some day and get it."

The others approving, the searchlight was turned upon the ground, as daylight had not yet broken, and with shovel and pick Barney and Pomp made a large trench, while Harry and Middleton brought some of the gold up from below in boxes.

While they were taking it from the water plane to bury it in the trench a troop of horsemen came dashing along a sequestered path in the woods—men who would have struck terror to the souls of all honest men, for they were armed to the teeth, and every one of them wore a black half-mask on his face. The gleam of the searchlight attracted their attention, and with accustomed caution they pressed through the trees, and from a hidden covert amid the verdant foliage they peered out and beheld what was going on.

Moreover, the conversation of the adventurers soon told these mysterious men that the water plane was heavily laden with gold and jewels worth several millions.

"A rich booty!" said the leader of the band. "Luck favours us, boys! And if we do not wrest this wonderful treasure from the water plane my name is not Captain Darke!"

They watched the adventurers bury several boxes filled with gold, and when Barney and Pomp had retired on board the water plane to get instructions from Frank to fill the casks with fresh water from a brook near by, they retired among the trees again, and half of them took off their masks.

Frank, Barney, and Pomp left the water plane and went over to the brook where they busied themselves at filling a couple of casks with water, when they received a startling surprise.

It was a rapid discharge of firearms and the shouting of men, the trampling of horses' hoofs, and a moment later ten breathless, unmounted men dashed up to them pursued by ten masked horsemen, the whole crowd firing volley after volley at each other.

But the moment the horsemen perceived Frank and his two companions they reined

in their beasts, wheeled about, and went dashing away amid the trees, where they disappeared.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise. "What does this mean?"

"Sir," exclaimed Captain Darke, approaching and bowing with military grace, "I and my companions, gentlemen from the town of Bloomsbury, were out for a hunt in the bush, when we had the misfortune to meet with a band of brigands, who came from the Sutter River, over yonder. We fought, but ran, and they pursued us here, when upon sight of your people they fled."

"How unfortunate!" said Frank, completely deceived by the outlaw's cunning. "Any of you injured?"

"No, thank Heaven! But we are exhausted, and if you will afford us the shelter of your house, we will be truly grateful."

"I do not live about here, sir," said Frank.

"Oh! I beg your pardon! How sorry I am! I feel faint, and much in need of an hour's rest with some food and stimulant, and my friends are in the same condition. Too bad, I assure you. Pardon the intrusion. We will try to evade the outlaws, and go on until we can find some hospitable roof."

"Hold on," said Frank, kindly. "You do not understand me."

"Oh, yes, I do. I am Lord Donald Darke, sir."

"Ah! but if you will listen I will explain to you that I and my friends are aeronauts, and we just landed here with a water plane of my invention, which needed repairs. I can offer you a good meal, and wine, spirits, and liquor. Pray come on board, your lordship, and I will do my best to entertain you."

"By Jove! this is queer," said Captain Darke. "But you are a jolly good chap, and I heartily thank you. Come on, gentlemen."

He shot a significant glance at his rascally followers, and beckoning to them they followed Frank on board the "Greyhound."

Pomp brought up the rear, but Barney remained behind.

When they were all in the cabin, and the others on board had been told Captain Darke's story, they were shown over the water plane and told of part of the adventures our friends passed through, by which time Pomp had prepared a dainty repast for them, and they were treated with the utmost hospitality.

The meal completed Barney suddenly came on board, and as he appeared in the doorway of the cabin with a peculiar look upon his face, Frank told him to fetch in some wine.

Barney went into Dr. Vaneyke's room before complying, and presently returned with five uncorked bottles and just enough glasses to supply the ten strangers. Frank noticed that he and the doctor and Howard had been omitted, and reminded Barney of the fact.

The Irishman said he would get them, and winked at Frank in such a significant manner that the young inventor became somewhat puzzled. But he knew that Barney had some object in view and could be trusted, so he made no remark.

The darkie filled the glasses with wine, a rich Burgundy, and as each one of the strangers raised his glass they drew their revolvers from their pockets at a signal from their leader.

Frank observed the action and started.

"Your very best health, sir!" laughed the brigand captain.

He nodded to Frank, and they all emptied their glasses.

"But, sir," said Frank, arising with a suspicious expression upon his face. "Those—revolvers?"

"Aim!" exclaimed Captain Darke, abruptly.

"Treachery!" cried Frank, as everyone in the room was covered by the pistols in the hands of the smiling outlaws.

"My good friend," coolly observed the outlaw, "we have shamefully deceived you, I am sorry to confess, for you are a very kind-hearted young man. But the fact is that we are aware that this strange vessel is laden with a vast treasure, and, being gentlemen who live at other people's expense, we planned this scheme to become masters of the gold. We could kill you all on the spot, but we won't, since you have been so kind to us, if you will act sensibly and obey my orders."

"And what are they?" demanded Frank, turning deathly pale.

"To submit quietly to imprisonment, and allow us to take the treasure from this ship without creating any disturbance."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then we shall be under the painful necessity of shooting you. Sir, I await your answer."

He motioned to the rest as he spoke, and they staggered to their feet.

"Begorra!" interposed Barney, keenly, eyeing the thieves, "it's mesilf will answer you, so I will, an' it's a bold defiance I'll be chuckin' up ter yer teeth, shure!"

"What! you court—you court bloodshed?"

"This much fer yez!" exclaimed Barney, as he saw one of the outlaws reel and fall to the floor. "I schtayed behoidn' whin yez kem aboard, bedad, an' be schpoyin' around I see ther rist av yer gang hoidin' in ther bushes. I heard what they said, an' soon tumbled ter ther loikes av yer game. Thin I kem back here, an' I met ther soldiers from Bloomsbury as was on yer thrail. I towld thim where yer friends wor in ther woods, an' left 'em ter tackle ther bastes. They'll be here in wan minute fer youes."

"By heavens!"

"Be this an' be that, too," continued Barney, rapidly, as he observed the man

swaying unsteadily, "afore I opened the wine shure I wint inter Doctor Vaneyke's rume, an' tuck a bit av a bottle av chloriform from his case, axin' his pardin fer a-doin' ther same—an' poured it inter ther wine yez dhrunk, an' be jabers, it's dhrugged yez arl are now."

But before the astute Barney had finished speaking, the whole band of outlaws was overcome by the drug, and they fell to the floor in various attitudes stupefied.

"Barney, you are a trump!" exclaimed Frank, warmly.

"Arrah, Masther Frank, it's a riyal floosh I be's!" said Barney, with a broad grin. "An' here comes ther sogers, shure."

The military came up on the water plane, and told Frank that they had captured the lurking companions of Barney's victims, and then the drugged men were taken off the ship and conveyed with the rest to Bloomsbury and locked up.

That night the "Greyhound" ascended into the air, and all hands but Pomp, who held the wheel, turned in. It was hardly an hour afterwards when Frank was suddenly awakened by a stifling feeling, and, jumping out of his berth, he found the state-room filled with dense smoke.

Startled beyond measure he quickly dressed himself and started for the door, when he heard May Bertram shriek:

"The water plane is in flames!"

Horried and ignorant of the fact that the badly insulated electric wire which he had mended in the hold had created the fearful mischief, Frank rushed out on deck. The "Greyhound" was a mass of flames!

"Doctor Vaneyke!" shouted Frank. "The fire extinguishers!"

"I've got some of them here!" shouted Howard, running up.

Pomp stuck manfully to the wheel, and was lowering the water plane as fast as he could.

Smoke and flames were pouring up through the crevices in the deck planking, out of the port-holes, and up through the forward hatchway.

Harry Howard held half a dozen blue bottles filled with some kind of liquid, the fumes of which were capable of smothering the flames when the contents were emptied. They all armed themselves with the bottles, and while three went forward to the hatchway, Frank and the doctor rushed down to the battery-room amidships.

A moment later the bottles went crashing down through the hatchway and in at the battery-room bulkhead door. There came a hissing and spluttering, vast clouds of smoke and steam ascended, and the bright glare of light suddenly was extinguished by the fluid.

Bottle after bottle was hurled, and in a very short space of time the fire was out.

It did not even have a chance to burn through the deck or the bulkhead; but when Frank went into the hold with a lantern he

saw that it would not have taken much longer for the entire conveyance to have been gutted.

The damage consisted chiefly in the fire burning the rubber from the wires, but no other serious loss was sustained; and a few glass insulators soon fixed the wires so that they could temporarily do no more mischief.

Several hours passed by, and in the meantime, as Frank sent word to Pomp to keep the "Greyhound" up in the air, she sped along at an altitude of a thousand feet again, heading for the mountains nearest to a point where she could reach the sea at Cumberland Islands.

The idea of stopping at Bloomsbury to sell some of the gold had been abandoned, as the boxes they buried in the glen where they encountered Captain Darke's brigands had been left there, and their weight being off the "Greyhound," she seemed able to proceed with facility.

The mountainous district was reached the next day, and the sea burst upon their view.

Frank and the doctor were having a chat a little later in the day, when they were startled by hearing a terrific clatter of heels up forward, sounding much as if a jig were being danced, and then a wild roar, followed by the tinkling of a banjo in the hands of Pomp, and the voice of Barney followed, crying:

"Whisky? Shure, an' it's not a naygun knows how it wor invinted!"

"Niggah dunno nuffin', 'cept dat de barnjo been made in Noah's Ark."

"Well, bedad, yez may as well lurrin first as lasht how ther divil himself invinted ther rale ould schtuff, an' if it's a chune in seven sharps ye'll be afther whangin' on that ould tin pan in double-quick toime, shure I'll tell yez all about it in a song! Let her go now, onld schmoked herrin's!"

A rattling accompaniment began, and Barney sang some wild verses.

The song had hardly been completed when Frank's attention was distracted from Barney's heels, which were clicking again on the deck, by seeing the "Greyhound" swooping down towards the sea. He rushed up forward, and to his dismay saw that the pilot-house was empty, and the water plane was plunging on without anyone at the wheel.

Barney and Pomp were both prancing around on the forward deck, and the whisky-bottle in Barney's hand, coupled with the wild actions and unsteady legs of his two friends, plainly told him that they were both drunk.

There was a stern look upon Frank's face as he rushed into the pilot-house and glanced at the levers. Then he shouted to Dr. Vaneyke to come and take the wheel.

"What is the matter?" hastily asked the worthy old scientist. "I see that Barney and Pomp are three sheets in the wind."

"Ay, the rascals! We might have gone down into the sea, for all the alarm they would have given us of the fact. As it is, we are sinking, and I cannot account for it. Hold her up as best you can, doctor, while I run down into the battery-room and try to discover the cause of the trouble."

He ran out on deck, leaving the wheel in the doctor's hands, struck against the two drunken dancers, just as Barney was in the act of doing a few fancy steps, and they both fell to the deck in a heap, yelling for someone to throw them a rope to save themselves.

Frank paid no attention to them, but when he got down in the battery-room his attention was drawn towards the accumulator-jars connected with the dynamos, and he observed that they were all emitting sparks at the binding-posts, where they were joined to one another by connecting wires.

Every spark was a loss of so much electricity, and he saw that the motive power was leaking away, weakening the jars so that it was as much as the dynamo could do to keep them charged sufficiently to keep the machinery in motion.

He made a close examination, and saw at a glance what occasioned the trouble that threatened to dash them into the sea.

"The enormous strain brought to bear upon the machinery has gradually been wearing it away and weakening it," he muttered, "for the gold is more in weight by double than what I should burden the 'Greyhound' with. The weight having ground down the wheels, and being unable to do any more mischief there, has turned its attention upon the electricity, the strain causing this bad leakage. I can stop it for a while, but it is bound to return, and we would descend again. Yet something must be done—and at once, too!"

These words scarcely had been uttered when he heard a tremendous tumult up on deck, and, rushing up the stairs, the first glance he cast around showed him that the water plane was rapidly darting down towards the sea. This, of course, would not have mattered so much in ordinary circumstances, but now Frank and the others feared that the weight of the gold would sink the vessel.

Everyone out on deck was wild, and Barney and Pomp were partially sobered by the excitement, and stood clinging to the rail glaring down at the sea glistening but a short distance below.

Several miles ahead Frank discerned a small strip of ground rising up from the sea, which he correctly judged to be one of the Cumberland Islands, which he had been steering for.

"Doctor Vaneyke," he shouted, "can't you raise her?"

"Not an inch, Frank, although I've got the level all the way out."

"In a few minutes we shall plunge into the sea and sink with this load on board."

"There is one remedy, though, Harry."

"And what is that?" asked Howard, blankly.

"To sacrifice more of the gold."

"Ah! that's too bad."

"Can't be helped."

"How long will it do us any good?"

"Until we reach that island."

"Ah! I see. All right, Reade."

"Once safe on shore I may repair the damage."

"Shall we heave some overboard?"

"Yes. Hurry—hurry! Barney, Pomp, you drunken brutes to neglect your duty so shamefully, come and help!"

The two culprits had very guilty faces as they ran below, and Matt Middleton looked disgusted.

"Blow me!" he muttered, "if things keep on this way long all o' ther cargo 'll be jettisoned, an' we won't get much o' that 'ere treasure. It's a shame!"

He ran after the others, and a minute later up came more of the gold on deck through the hatchway, and Frank and Howard seized it and hurled it over the side.

The keel of the water plane was just grazing the crests of the waves as it went over, and as heap after heap of the precious metal, encrusted with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires, went splashing into the sea the invention rose again.

She went up to a height of a hundred feet and sped along at a very much reduced rate of velocity, yet she was clear for a while of the water, and Frank cried:

"There! that will do, boys; but stay where you are a while, in case of an emergency."

He heard a loud crackling noise coming from the battery-room, and went down again in a hurry, only to see that the sparks were now snapping fast and furious from the binding-post wires.

It was evident that the leakage was becoming worse every moment, and he went up on deck again.

"Doctor, what is her rate of speed?" he shouted.

"The indicator says only ten miles an hour. Frank, though the levers are out to the 200 notch," replied Vaneyke.

"We are losing power at a fearful rate."

"Can't you repair the damage?"

"Not while the wires are charged from the battery."

"Well, she is holding her own again."

"It will only last a few minutes, I fear."

"The island is only a league away now."

"But at the rate we are traveling it will take eighteen minutes for us to get there, at six minutes to the mile. Slow—dreadfully slow!"

He keenly watched the progress of the water plane for several minutes, during which it went along at its present height, then it began to gradually sink down again.

"She is bound to strike the sea!" he muttered.

"Mr. Reade," said May Bertram.

"Well?" asked Frank, turning round.

"We have travelled one mile."

"Then six minutes passed while we were elevated?"

"Yes, according to my watch, as I timed our flight."

"It will take us twelve more to reach the island."

"Yes. I've been calculating. Say six minutes' elevation, and six of depression or descent. We shall probably be down six minutes. Then but a loss of as much gold as you just threw overboard, once more will give us six minutes' elevation again, and that, with the loss sustained during the descent, would land us well up on the dry land."

"That is a neat calculation, Miss Bertram, but distances are deceiving on the water, you know. Ah! we are down again!"

"More ballast overboard!" cried the doctor.

Up came a large cask and several boxes through the hatchway from Middleton, Barney, and Pomp.

Frank and Howard seized them, and with regretful sighs sent them down into the sea.

The "Greyhound" ducked into the rolling waves, sending a shower of briny spray up over the deck, and glided along on top of them for some distance. Then she sprang up into the air again, fluttered there spasmodically a few minutes, and with a sudden rush she came down and settled on the waves, while from the battery-room emanated a series of explosions and shocks that plainly told Frank that the electric storing-jars were emptied.

He was rather pale in the face as he watched the action of the water plane in the water, and his heart gave a great throb of dismay as he noticed that the ballast was yet too heavy for her, and that she was gradually sinking!

CHAPTER 9.

In the Grip of the Storm King.—The Water Plane Wrecked.—A Case of Touch-and-Go.

CUMBERLAND ISLANDS were fully a mile distant when the "Greyhound" struck the sea, and as Frank observed that the plane was being dragged down by the sheer weight of the ballast he turned to the others and exclaimed:

"I do not want any of you to become panic-stricken, but the fact is we are sinking."

A general murmur of alarm succeeded this announcement.

"Be calm!" shouted Frank. "We are not lost yet. There is a means of keeping her afloat. More of the ballast must go overboard. Our lives are more valuable than the gold."

He worked methodically, swiftly and

hard himself, and the rest emulated his example with a will.

Boxes, barrels, packages, and casks into which the gold had been stored were thrown from the hold, rolled and carried to an open gangway, and thrown overboard.

Enormous wealth was thus cast into the sea, and the water plane, settling down, was soon beam-ends under the waves.

"Don't stop!" cried Frank, tussling with a heavy box, "and we will yet save her. Work on! Quick! quick!"

The influx of water retarded them a good deal, but they grimly toiled on, and mass after mass of gold went flying overboard, until the settling of the inundated water plane suddenly ceased, and she began to rise. It was only a gradual, slow movement, though, and hundreds of pounds of the gold came out of the hold before the submerged decks came up to a level with the surface of the sea once more.

"I've got a few studding sails on board," said Frank, when they were all assembled on deck, "and as the machinery has come to an entire standstill we can rig these sails, and the rudder will steer us to the nearest island with this free wind in no time."

"Where can May Bertram be?" asked Harry, suddenly.

"I saw her enter the cabin," replied Frank.

"Then I'll go and see if she is all right."

"You, Barney, Pomp, and Matt, get out those sails."

"Yis, sor," said Barney, saluting and moving away.

"Hold on, you villain!" interposed Frank. "Are you sober yet?"

"I am that, sor," said Barney, coming to a pause.

"Then explain to me where you and Pomp got that whisky."

"'Twor a bit av a bottle I schmuggled aboard at Sydney for medical purposes, sor," said Barney, with a guilty look.

"And you were taken violently sick and needed it, I suppose, while in the discharge of your duty as pilot."

"Shure, an' it's cramps I had——"

"And thereby endangered all our lives. Mind you, Barney, and you, too, Pomp, a repetition of this sort of an offence will meet with my severest displeasure."

The sails Frank mentioned were brought up from below and were rigged, and a pump connected by belting to the machine soon made the water plane lighter by emptying the hold of the water she had shipped.

Frank took the wheel, and as the sails broke out before a stiff south-westerly wind the half-wrecked "Greyhound" forged on towards the island, and Harry Howard

came out of the cabin with May Bertram, she having sought shelter there when they were working.

Within a short space of time the "Greyhound" forged up to Cumberland Islands, and being of such light draught she glided through the shoaling water without any danger.

Beyond they could see the Great Barrier Reefs, an immense stretch that ran many miles along the eastern coast of Australia, the surf beating against them bursting with the noise of thunder, and the water dashing high up in the air.

There was a small lagoon directly ahead of the water plane, and the high tide did not conceal a channel that ran into it from the sea. Frank steered the "Greyhound" through it with unerring precision.

They passed between two rugged cliffs of beetling black rock glistening with the water that broke against them, and rode into a small cove with a rocky shore that stretched away to where a few solitary palm-trees grew.

Frank then rounded up the "Greyhound" in the wind, an anchor was hove, and as they were all very much exhausted and knew that they were safe enough for the present they turned in to get some much-needed rest.

The next day dawned ere they awakened, and Pomp prepared a good breakfast, to which all did ample justice.

An examination was made of the "Greyhound," and Frank saw that he would have to beach her at high tide to make repairs. This was accordingly done, and with the aid of the others she was put into flying condition in one day.

Frank then made an estimate of the weight of the remaining gold in the hold, and calculating the suspensory power of his machinery he had some more of the gold taken out of the hold and buried on the island, in order that the remaining weight would equilibrate the power of the machinery.

Darkness had fallen by this time, the sky looked threatening, and rain began to fall.

A rumbling—a sudden shock—a terrific explosion, and a vast upheaval of the earth suddenly flung them down.

They were all dining in the cabin at the time, and as Frank rushed out on deck he felt the water plane shaking and rocking on the ground in a frightful manner.

A peculiar, gaseous odour filled the air, and he saw the rocks, trees, ground—in fact, the whole island shaking.

Then the truth suddenly flashed across mind.

"What is it?" gasped Vaneyko.

"Doctor, can't you understand this? It is an earthquake!"

Boom! boom! boom! came a sullen, muffled roar under the earth, and it was instantly followed by a terrible grinding and splitting noise, rocks fell crashing, the entire island was split in two, and volcanic flames leaped up from the gaping fissure all around the "Greyhound."

Frank rushed up to the pilot-house, followed by the doctor, and springing in he pulled out the lever to raise the water plane from the shaking ground.

At the same time he started the search-light.

Its broad, piercing glare shot out ahead on the ground, and showed him that there was a vast rent in the earth beside the "Greyhound," from which emanated furious, sullen roars as the sea water rushed in upon the burning underground gases, causing an immense sheet of steam to arise with a fierce hissing noise.

For an instant the "Greyhound" did not respond to the lever, and Frank began to get anxious. But then with a spasmodic effort she arose to a height of a few feet from the ground and sank down again.

A cry of terror from the others out on deck caused Frank to look over the side, and a deathly pallor overspread his face as he observed that the water plane had fallen on the brink of the great split in the earth. She was half on the ground and half overhanging the dark gulf, while from beneath her hull the edge of the chasm was crumbling from her weight, and it became evident that in a minute more she would either topple over into the abyss, or else the ground would give way beneath and send her crashing down.

Quick as a flash Frank apprehended the danger.

A jerk at the lever brought it to its last notch, and he pulled out a brass plug in the connecting-plate at the bottom of the switchboard and thrust it in another hole, thereby disconnecting the battery for the machinery, and substituting that of the accumulators.

The moment the current was cut off, and during the brief interval required for the dynamo to operate and charge the wires, the machinery suddenly stopped.

The "Greyhound," having nothing then to sustain her, began to slip down into the roaring chasm, the bottom of which could not be seen in the dense darkness below. There came crash upon crash as the earth and rocks gave way, and a horrible, grinding noise that made the entire water plane shake as she slid downward.

Down went the "Greyhound."

A groan pealed from every mouth. The shock flung them over and they glanced wildly around.

Darkness—dense darkness everywhere save for the electric lights.

Then there sounded a shrill buzzing and whistling. The dynamo had taken hold of the machinery.

A moment of intense, anxious suspense followed. Then up shot the "Greyhound" into the air with a whir, and they darted towards cloudland in safety.

It had been a most trying ordeal to pass through, but once at the height of eight hundred feet over the island they found themselves comparatively safe again above the storm.

Several hours passed uneventfully by, the water plane going on swiftly.

"Barney," shouted Frank, a few hours before dawn of day, "go down in the battery-room and see if the jars are leaking."

"Ay, sor, an' it's troo ther chube I'll be afther tellin' yer."

An interval of silence followed.

Frank had glanced down at the devastation on the island, and he saw the peculiar phenomena—of lightning flashing amid the ascending clouds of red glowing smoke and haze that came up towards them.

Then the earthquake showed him to what a marvellous extent its throes extended by suddenly upheaving the entire strip of land in a chaotic mass, and amid a vivid sheet of flame and smoke it then sank beneath the ocean's crest never to appear again. What had once been the tiny island that proved to be of such service to Frank and his friends was no more than a mass of scattered debris lying on the bed of the sea, its place taken by a smooth sheet of water.

"Masther Frank, ther jars is behavin' thimselves!" came a voice up the speaking-tube.

"Is the dynamo working properly?" called Frank.

"Reg'lar as an old clock."

"All right. Stay down there and watch the machinery. I am not going to have any more accidents happen to us now just for the want of a little watchfulness."

"Och, it's a hermit's job, sor, an', as it's moighty lonesome I'll be, if yer would be koind enough ter sind their naygur down wid me, Masther Frank, dear, shure, an' I could whoile away ther toime more pleasantly be tazin' him wid me fut on ther tails av his coat——"

"There—there! that will do. I'm going to punish you for getting drunk yesterday by keeping you employed in solitary confinement. But I'll send Matt Middleton down to relieve you after the time of your wetch below expires."

"Faix, it's hard upon me ye be's."

Frank closed the tube without replying, a smile upon his face, and started the propellers faster.

The night crept on, the wind arose to

a north-east gale, and a pall-like blackness settled down upon everything; but the water plane went steadily on her course.

The clocks struck three.

It seemed to be a magical signal to the storm king, for the heaped-up clouds burst over the doomed "Greyhound" as the last silvery tinkle sounded, and with the roar of artillery the thunder burst forth.

Again and again the hoarse and echoing booming pealed out, accompanied by glaring tongues of zig-zagging lightning that split the murky sky like a cleaver. Then the rain descended in torrents.

Beaten down the water plane drove along over the pitching and tumbling waves of the sea, until with a deafening explosion a bolt flew down from the sky, struck the steel hull, and enveloped in an electrical glare of a strange colour the "Greyhound" was dashed down further and plunged into the sea.

Everybody but the young inventor and Dr. Vaneyke had gone into the cabin to be out of the way of danger; but Frank and the old scientist remained in the pilot-house, not daring to trust the vessel to the management of anyone else.

"Do you observe how the wind keeps pushing us down?"

"Readily. But our heavy golden ballest has something to do with that, I am afraid, Frank," said the old gentleman.

Glare after glare of lightning lit up the sky, followed by continuous claps of thunder as the water plane arose again. She seemed to leap up and shake the brine from her hull, but only to be again drenched as badly by the falling rain.

Up she shot among the low, hanging storm-clouds before Frank was well aware of it, and the electric searchlight blazing out ahead showed him that the water plane was in the midst of a monstrous cloud, towards which another cloud was rushing with appalling velocity.

"Up—up! Higher!" shouted the professor, grasping a lever and pulling it out further. "The two clouds will meet in a moment, and lightning will fly out of them in all directions as soon as they do!"

Aloft darted the "Greyhound."

Then there came a heavy booming that nearly deafened them as the water plane shot through the black vapour, and a huge spark flew from the edge of the meeting clouds. With an appalling report it burst, and myriads of brilliant, dazzling sparks shot in all directions, some vanishing in space, and others forming in streaks that whizzled off at a tangent.

Frank found that though the fierce violence of the wind current below the storm-clouds was lessened at the altitude they were in, yet there was another strata of storm piling up above them.

"We must descend!" he exclaimed. "It would not do to get caught in those clouds."

"By no means. They have a sinister look."

"Much worse than the ones below us, I think."

"True, my boy. Run the risk of descending again."

This advice was hardly necessary, for a sheet of wind and rain swept down upon the tossing water plane, and beat her to a lower strata of air below the first series of storm-clouds over the sea.

Hailstones as big as walnuts showered down upon the ill-fated plane, pelting her with the rattling sound of musketry, and the "Greyhound" darted down in circles again to within a hundred yards of the billows.

The din that came up from the angry sea struck terror to their souls, and the leaping and surging waves mounted to an enormous height, as if eagerly anxious to drag the water plane into their embrace and carry her down to the mythical caverns of mermaids on the bed of the sea.

A flash came again, and a huge fire-ball struck the after part of the plane, showing in the momentary glare the dismantled hull of a wrecked schooner driven along on the water below at the mercy of the wind and the waves.

But scarcely had Frank observed this sad sight, when there sounded an explosion of the fire-ball near the cabin, and the door was flung open, a shriek pealed out above the din of the warring elements, and May Bertram rushed out on deck.

Only an instant the frightened girl stood, and then a violent lurch of the hull knocked her down and sent her rolling over to the lee railing.

She arose, and seizing a dangling rope she made an effort to steady herself, when another fierce roll of the "Greyhound" whirled her off into space from the deck.

In the cabin doorway stood Harry Howard, the picture of mute despair, while behind him crowded Barney, Pomp, and Matt Middleton.

Frank had seen the accident, and, leaving the wheel in the hands of Doctor Van-eyke, he dashed out to the spot where the girl had disappeared.

He waited for a succeeding flash of lightning to come, and then he saw that one end of the rope was fastened to a ring

bolt on the railing, while the other end hung over the side, and the girl, a dozen yards below the ship, was clinging to it.

The next moment he was beside the rope and seized hold of it outside the railing, beginning to haul it in with all his might. Harry Howard joined him.

Hand over hand they drew up the rope, until at last the half-fainting girl's arms came in reach, when Frank stooped over, caught hold of her, and lifted her upon the deck.

She fell into Howard's arms half-stupefied.

"How came she to run out?" asked Frank.

"A fire-ball struck the cabin roof, and, exploding, frightened her."

"Did it do any damage?"

"The roof is all torn off, and a part of the floor planking of the cabin has been ripped away with the wires."

"That is bad. Tell Barney to go down below and get the boat out in readiness for use if need be."

"Are we in such danger as that?"

"There is no knowing what to expect."

"By Jove, this storm is a terror!"

"The worst I ever experienced. Go!"

Howard wasted no more time in idle talk, but left Frank with the thunder roaring and the lightning blazing around him while he carried the girl back into the cabin.

Frank found the professor struggling hard with the wheel, and told him what had just occurred.

"I'm afraid the storm is increasing, Frank," said the doctor.

"That is bad. It is fierce enough now."

"And your prediction stands a good chance to come true."

"You begin to think we cannot save the plane, eh?"

"She is in such a dilapidated condition the chances are all against her fighting through this storm."

"I just sent Barney word to prepare the boat for use."

"A wise provision."

"Hark! What is that?"

"A fearful snapping noise!"

"Look! The wires are all surcharged by the electricity in the air, and are becoming luminous. That is a bad omen."

"And the snapping noise we hear is produced by the weakest wire breaking. The end has come!"

Frank shouted through the cabin speak-

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ing-tube, and the rest were informed of the danger menacing them.

"The 'Greyhound' proceeds slower," observed the doctor. "Look! we are driving down to the sea like a shooting star, and we may strike close to that wreck!"

"Quick, then! guide her that way!"

"What are your hopes?"

"To buoy up the water plane with the wreck. It could never live in that sea."

"I fear it will be impossible."

"Yet it is our only chance."

"I will do my best, Frank."

"All hands on deck!" shouted Frank, in the tube.

He ran out on deck himself after shouting to the others, and met his friends leaving the cabin, and carrying out a twenty-foot boat of Frank's construction capable of holding all hands.

They secured it so that it could not be blown away, and under Frank's directions armed themselves with ropes.

But for the coolness and nerve shown by the young inventor at that trying crisis they might have lost courage, and once panic-stricken all hope of saving their lives would be gone.

Down went the "Greyhound" of her own accord, the professor steering her as best he could, while Frank shouted his orders to the others.

Within a minute the water plane struck the surface with a bang that almost sent them overboard, and caught in the swinging waves she was thrown about like a feather. Fortunately the wreck was not a great distance off.

Not to dwell upon details suffice it that they finally reached the dismantled schooner, a line was fastened to the stump of the mainmast, and the "Greyhound" was dragged up alongside of the wreck.

Half a dozen stout lines were hove from the wreck to the water plane, and the "Greyhound," thus buoyed up with just her deck above the sea, was secured.

The unfortunate aeronauts then took refuge in the submerged cabin, and not finding a soul on board they concluded that the schooner had been abandoned by her crew.

All through the night the furious tempest raged with unabated vigour, through the succeeding day, and far into the following night.

It was a time of dread and horror, and an experience they would never forget.

When the fury of the storm had somewhat abated Frank ventured out on deck, and saw that the lashings that held the vessels together were gradually wearing away.

He called the rest out and stated that he feared the "Greyhound" would shortly founder, whereupon they all set to work

with a will, and transferred all the gold, eatables, and water to the schooner.

Within an hour after this was done the lashings parted, and the "Greyhound" sank beneath the ocean like a shot.

Frank uttered a sigh of deep regret.

"It is too bad after all the work I did on her," he muttered. "But the time will come when I will eclipse her with a greater invention to startle the scientific world."

The schooner had been heeled over by the drag of the water plane at her port side, but she righted herself and rode on an even keel when the "Greyhound" sank.

Several days passed uneventfully by, the unlucky navigators making themselves as comfortable as they could in the circumstances, and a sharp lookout was constantly kept up in search of a passing vessel.

Nearly a week passed by without a friendly sail coming in sight. Luckily the sea remained unruffled and calm, a cool, pleasant breeze blowing.

At the end of the sixth day Frank was pacing up and down the deck, when Barney came running up from below excitedly.

"Masther Frank, sor!" he exclaimed, "we're a-goin' ter sink, afther all, be jabbers!"

"What! How can it be possible?"

"Shure, an' it's pokin' down in the hold, I wuz, whin what shu'd I see but dayloight a-schtramin' in along the garboards, an' it didn't take me long fur to say that ther rackin' this ship got has waikened her timbers an' plankin' from ther keel."

"By Jove!"

"An' but ther laist taste av a knockin' around ag'in will dhrove ther keel completely out av her, whin begob it's apart she may fall, a-schpillin' us into ther say ter schwim back to Ameriky!"

To satisfy himself Frank followed Barney down, and saw that he had told the truth.

He thereupon went up on deck again, and was about to apprise the rest, when he heard Harry Howard shout:

"Sail ho—sail ho!"

They rushed up forward, joining Harry in the bow where he stood, and Frank withheld his information in order not to damp their joyous spirits.

Afar in the distance a steamer hove in sight, and Matt Middleton danced a horn-pipe, hitched up his trousers, and shouted:

"Hooray—hooray! I knowed as thar wuz a sweet little cherub wot sets up aloft ter watch over poor Jeck tar."

The steamer must have sighted them, for it came directly towards them, and in due course arrived within hailing distance, and to the wrecked navigators' surprise they saw that she was the "Reindeer."

"The steamer we descended on coming over at the time of the mutiny," said Frank, "and she is bound for San Francisco. By Jove, fortune favours us at last! And it is about time. We are saved!"

A moment later there came a hail from the steamer:

"Ship ahoy—ahoy—ahoy!"

"'Reindeer' ahoy!" shouted Frank.

"What is the matter—a wreck?"

"Ay, a derelict. Take us aboard!"

The steamer hauled to and a boat was lowered.

When it reached the wreck matters were explained to the captain, who came on board, causing him no end of amazement, and he readily consented to carry them and the gold back to California.

Accordingly the transfer was made, the wreck was abandoned, and with happy hearts they steamed away homeward-

bound with a great part of the gold saved. An uneventful voyage across the Pacific followed, and when they reached San Francisco and disembarked the gold and precious stones were sold and the proceeds divided.

The captain of the "Reindeer" was amply rewarded, and ere Harry Howard and May Bertram left San Francisco they were married in the presence of all their fellow-voyagers.

Frank, Dr. Vaneyke, Barney, and Pomp went to Readestown, and there we must leave them for the time being.

Of all the remarkable adventures they had passed through during the course of their lives they would never forget the thrilling escapes they had with the water plane, "Greyhound."

THE END.

A Word from Your Editor

Two Other Clinking Stories.

WILL readers please note that this is the third book of a set of three just published? The other two (Nos. 4 and 5), entitled respectively "Frank Reade in Polar Seas" and "Frank Reade's Prairie Coach," are clinking stories. You will still be able to obtain them from your newsagent.

Who's for Detective Tales?

I can hardly grasp the meaning of a letter I have received from a reader signing himself "Spotter." He declares that the Frank Reade stories are just the kind of yarns he likes, and then he goes on to say that it would be a good idea to put a detective story in the series now and then.

But why, O "Spotter," should I include detective stories in the INVENTION LIBRARY? Surely if you like the Frank Reade yarns so much you would be loth to part with even one a month? Besides, if you want detective stories there are plenty of good ones to be obtained.

Take, for instance, the TIP TOP TALES. There you have a fine series of penny books, each containing a splendid detective novel. Then, again, a number of the BOYS' OWN LIBRARY, recently published and now on sale, provides a long detective romance, entitled "Joe Phoenix, Police Spy." Perhaps you would prefer this as being more solid, for the BOYS' OWN LIBRARY is a thick, threepenny book, containing as much reading matter as many a six-shilling novel. But, although not so long, the TIP TOP TALES are just as good, and I should advise you to sample one.



To Become a Cinema Operator.

There's a reader in Birmingham who wants to become a cinema operator, and asks me how to accomplish that end. It's easy. You will find that several of the larger firms advertise almost daily in the newspapers for men and youths anxious to learn the business. All our Birmingham friend need do is to write to them for particulars. There is plenty of opportunity for him just now, and I wish him luck.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers, and will do his best to help them in any matters upon which they may care to consult him. Questions of general interest will be dealt with on this page; when a reply by post is required a stamped envelope should be enclosed.

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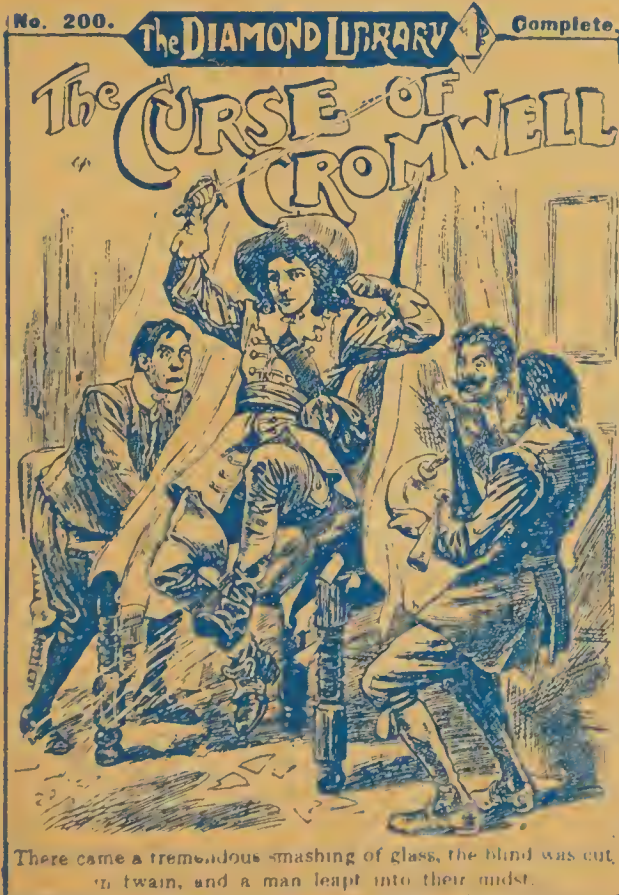
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